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Michael D. Sharbaugh
Georgia State University, m-ash@comcast.net

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NEGOTIATIONS FOR SPOOKY SPACES DURING THE HALLOWEEN SEASON: CHRISTIAN TRUNK-OR-TREATS IN THE BIBLE BELT SOUTH

by

MICHAEL DAVID SHARBAUGH

Under the Direction of Emanuela Guano

ABSTRACT

The Halloween ritual, trick-or-treat, has compelled suburban residents in Atlanta, Georgia to parade throughout the shared public spaces of their communities' streets for nearly a century. In recent years, however, privatized children's rituals beyond the realm of the neighborhood seemingly compete for trick-or-treat's participants: trunk-or-treats in church parking lots now rise in popularity. I parse the impetuses behind the construction of these innovative ritual spaces using in-depth interviews and participant observations alongside the Christian churches who host them and the parents and guardians who participate in them. Cursorily appearing solely as privatized defangings of otherwise venomous and pagan-aligned public rites, trunk-or-treats embody social action in other ways: by actualizing and expanding faith communities' networks of social capital, they not only afford churches the means to surmount various challenges they face in the New South, but also provide safe and attractive options for security-conscious parents and guardians in contemporary suburban Atlanta.

INDEX WORDS: Christianity, Ritual, Halloween, Atlanta, Secularism, Crime, Social Fear, Commodification, American South, Holiday, Performance, Religion, Community outreach, Public, Private, Paganism, Space, Place, Religion, Pastoralism, Children and youth, Practice theory, Advocacy

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MICHAEL DAVID SHARBAUGH

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

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Georgia State University

2012

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MICHAEL DAVID SHARBAUGH

Committee Chair: Emanuela Guano

Committee: Jennifer Patico

Faidra Papavasiliou

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies

College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

August 2012

DEDICATION

To Dad, My Family, My Wife:

For All Those Flowers I Didn't See …

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1 INTRODUCTION

I went trick-or-treating Halloween of 2011. Without a disguise and six feet tall, I might have appeared strange. While costumed children darted from house to house shouting *trick-or-treat* or some rhyme related, I remained on the sidewalk, slightly deafened by the scratch of the crispy leaves I was shuffling through. The din, however, didn't overpower the gleeful sounds around me.

I, and the cadre I found myself in, were in a residential enclave notorious for ending trick-or-treating at 8:00 PM. The time loomed near, and the police officer directing traffic at the intersection up ahead did not miss his cue: just as we ascended a hill, several air-horns sounded, grating our ears and echoing throughout the neighborhood. Announcements emanated from a police cruiser: trick-or-treating was over. It was barely dark.

I recalled this episode while attending an All Saints' Day mass the following morning, where not a word was mentioned of the Halloween holiday just a day prior. This seemed an odd exclusion, for I imagined the priest would have wanted both a witty segue and to command the attention of all the children sitting in the pews. Tara, children's minister at Bromwich United Methodist Church, offered an explanation. In low and guarded voice, she told me that, not long ago at work, she was not allowed to discuss Halloween or any of the things that revolve around Halloween—"ghosts, goblins, witches, jack-o'-lanterns, even spiders." However, she explained, "The world today … is much more tolerant and much more accepting of things that are thought of as being pagan."[1] She admitted she and her co-workers are intrigued by television shows like *Ghost Hunters* and *Ghost Adventures*, and that people like them who do are now embraced by the ministry. On the other hand, she added, ministers who think that reading Harry Potter in schools will lead to Satanism are considered "kooky." Ministries, she believed, should "go along with where we are in the world" and use Halloween as an "opportunity to still use God."

[1] I utilize a lower-case spelling (and a Eurocentric sense) of the word, *pagan*, throughout this work in order to suggest that I refer to no specific path, coven, or tradition in particular, for varied and individualistic they are both in time and space (see Adler 2006[1979]).

I, without a child and currently unchurched, wondered: of what social stuff were the above exemplars of policed license and modest piety made? On whose account were they exercised and why? Surely, with a Halloween that is mass-marketed and memorialized, there must be some motive behind the restrain.

The United States holiday known as Halloween and its attendant ritual, trick-or-treat, do not arrive at all American's doors welcomed like "sunlike pumpkin pie" (Turner 1969:183). Indeed, while parading through neighborhoods intent on gifts of candy, participants of Halloween's trick-or-treating ritual find many suburban Americans'[2] stoops darkened to their advance, lights and cheer extinguished. In some cases it may be, simply, that nobody is home. Just as likely is the possibility that the occupant has found another way to celebrate, to ignore or concede, or to just let the procession pass on by.

Foley and O'Donnell (2009:3) cite the "sheer polysemy of the event, its astonishing ability to mean so many things to so many different (groups of) people." Halloween, from its conceptual beginnings, has hosted among its infinite number of symbolic associations several contrasting cultural categorizations. A few of these are potentially controversial for some Christian Americans, and, therefore, call into question the moral bearing of the holiday's presence in the nation. Some Christians with whom I have spoken, for example, position three binary distinctions under the connotative rubric of the term, *Halloween*: Christian–pagan; good–evil; horror–delight. In an effort to embrace the holiday, these Christians have needed to dislodge it from its more blasphemous moorings; through their churches, they have introduced *trunk-or-treats*.

Trunk-or-treats are rituals. They are somewhat similar to the long-standing Halloween ritual, trick-or-treat, in which costumed children thread from door to door in neighborhoods to collect candy from both strangers and familiars. During trunk-or-treating excursions, however, instead of meandering from house to house along public roads, children flit from car trunk to car trunk in a closed circuit of pri-

[2] With a reluctant adherence to academic convention, I use the terms, *America*, *American*, and *Americans*, throughout this work to refer to individuals who live in the contiguous and continental United States of America.

vate church parking lots, sweet-teeth-in-tow. In the trunk-or-treat ritual, the rear tailgates of vehicles replace the front porches of homes.

Trunk-or-treats have caught on like wildfire in the suburbs of Atlanta, Georgia. The concept, just over a decade old, can trace its beginnings to the southern portion of the United States (US), to the states that comprise what is known as the Bible Belt. Here, where ties to an antebellum agrarian economy had lingered long past the Industrial Revolution, rural lifestyles did persist, and many residents of the South[3] have, therefore, tended to revere the church as the fundamental community institution. Thus, here, where Christian religiosity and conservatism have remained intense as compared to other regions of the country, conditions have been ripe for a sea change of what had been long considered pagan-aligned Halloween celebrations.

The Atlanta region has changed much in the last decade, over which the incidence of trunk-or-treats has blossomed in and around Halloween-time. What had once been intended as a replacement for trick-or-treating is now a complement to it; the trunk-or-treat exudes a life of its own. Such events are not merely reflections of the near-centenarian ritual, trick-or-treat; they are, I argue, nascent adaptations to changes in the Atlantan cityscape and, more importantly, viable indicators of a fluctuating religious landscape there.

As of late, the "Old South" has been transformed into a "New South," where employment opportunities have flourished whilst a low cost of living perseveres (Whitelegg 2002:130; Kiplinger 2012[2011]:1). In 1996, the Olympic Games made "Hotlanta" their home. With the Olympics arrived throes of transplants from all over the country, including myself, a native Pennsylvanian. Since my arrival, I have looked on as Atlanta, the "City of Trees," has become a forest of buildings. Dusty paths have surrendered to concrete and creosote, leaving Atlanta a crossroads destination with cosmopolitan flair. Particularly in the suburban areas of the metropolitan Atlantan churches where I have focused my research—Decatur, Duluth, Lilburn, John's Creek, Kennesaw, and Conyers, infrastructural and community

[3] In this paper, I use the US Census' definition when referencing the South. This definition encompasses the states of Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia (US Census N.d.:1).

development has been intense, and ethnic and religious diversity increasingly rife. Hunt *et al*. (2008:97) cited the perpetual surge of a "growing black middle class of urban professionals" entering Atlanta since the 1940s. In what has been called the *return migration*, blacks and African-Americans clamber to the New South to pursue economic opportunity and a lower degree of racial segregation; some come to claim what they deem to be ancestral grounds (Hunt *et al*. 2008:97, 111; Falk *et al*. 2004; Farley and Frey 1994; Adelman *et al*. 2000). In addition to these individuals, Atlanta's become home for a multitude of others—over 20 thousand immigrants in 2010 alone (United States Department of Homeland Security 2011:17).

For all of its growth, however, metropolitan Atlanta has paid several tolls. There has been an augmentation of the amount of crime, particularly that involving human sex trafficking and child prostitution (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Programs 2002; see Priebe and Suhr 2005; see Goodman 2005:1). There has been a notable attrition of membership at any one Christian institution, particularly as Protestants shuffle from church to church in the face of a waxing Catholic presence and *vis-à-vis* the expansions of "historically black" churches (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life 2008:5–6; Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life 2009:1, 9; Kosmin and Keysar 2009:3; see *Time, Inc*. 2009:1). Americans, although becoming more "spiritual" overall, are increasingly reluctant to call any church their home, preferring, instead, to practice their beliefs in private beyond any denomination or church proper (Kosmin and Keysar 2009:2, 3, 6; Kosmin *et al*. 2009:I; Heelas *et al*. 2005; see Cimino and Lattin 1998). In light of these articulations, I ask, what might a discursive analysis of the presence and processual qualities of trunk-or-treat rituals contemporaneous with the US holiday, Halloween, inform us about how Christian Atlantans surmount the challenges they face in their New South cityscapes?

In this study, I showcase trunk-or-treat hosts and participants and attempt to bring to the fore their intents for the events they create. Since the autumn of 2011, I have been skirting throughout the suburbs of Atlanta, Georgia meeting with the ministers of Christian churches both to understand the utility of their trunk-or-treat events and to participate in them. Using a practice framework (see Bourdieu 1977[1972]; see Ortner 2006) and conceiving of the ritual's spaces as exemplars of ambient faith (Engelke 2012), I

espouse that social actors carry within themselves the ability to navigate their futures as they see fit, and can span the public–private divide through their application of sensorial tactics.

Herein, I explore how trunk-or-treats embody social action—that is, I seek to convey how the rituals empower some Christian groups in the Atlanta suburbs to convene with the trappings of mainstream American culture, to bolster the membership of their congregations, to provide residents near and far safe-havens from crime, and, all the while, how they enable them to be a light to their geographical communities as disciples of Jesus.

The majority of my ethnography is devoted to discussing the challenges faced by the hosts of trunk-or-treats—typically children's ministries affiliated with churches in suburban Atlantan communities. It consists of four thematic subsections. Throughout these sections, I uncover why trunk-or-treat events are attractive options for parents and guardians of children, as well.

The first theme I will present, entitled "'Be a Light' … As Disciples of Jesus," is where I will discuss how my informants use trunk-or-treating events to announce their presence to those in their outlying geographical communities in order to exemplify their Christian identity. As Christians, they consider themselves contracted by their faith to make themselves and their faith known to those who are not members of their congregation, just as they claim Christ had done. They operate to attract not only those whom seek to become members of their particular church or the Christian faith in general—which shall be discussed in a latter subsection—but those who are in some form of crisis. Trunk-or-treats thereby serve as exploratory meeting places between churches, congregations, and their outlying geographical communities.

All of my host informants cast their trunk-or-treating events as provisional safe havens. Most perceived their urban environments as potentially dangerous during the Halloween season. The church ministries conceived of their role in the community as being one both qualified and uniquely equipped to afford security. Some of the concerns informants had with Halloween and, particularly, the trick-or-treat ritual were expressed as the presence of strangers, and the potentialities of tainted candies and sexual predation upon children. Many cited the increases of ethnic diversity and the high turnover rate of homeownership

in their urban environments as fueling these and the aforementioned concerns.[4] The title of this second subsection is "'Be a Light' … As Safe Harbors from Crime."

By presenting themselves to the public through trunk-or-treat events, some churches not only attract newcomers, but aim also to dispel their reputation(s) for being stuffy, upright, or austere. Thus, a third theme I will discuss is based upon what the church ministers have variously described as a desire to better engage mainstream American culture. Trunk-or-treat events provide churches a means for self-growth, in that they can grapple with symbolic systems that have formerly caused them discomfort: Halloween iconography such as ghosts, goblins, and gore are judiciously assimilated, apparently in response to the popularity of children's literature featuring mystical characters like Harry Potter, the tamed-down representations of horror icons such as vampires and werewolves in teen movies, and the overall commercialization and commoditization of the holiday. Acknowledging the fact that a great deal of their communities and their cultures at large celebrate Halloween in one or more of its aspects, many churches, through their ministries, have chosen to negotiate additional—and sometimes alternative—Halloweenish rituals and fall festival events to step out of their comfort zones and realize an opportunity for socialization with the communities around them. I call this subsection "Convene with the Culture."

Although most churches regain little of the initial cost they put into the events, they do, sometimes, gain new members. Thus, a fourth theme consists of a brief discussion concerning how trunk-or-treats afford an opportunity to garner an influx of new members for the churches. The title of this fourth thematic subsection is "Become …"

Nuances of my ethnography will convey other experiences I have had during Halloween in 2011. They will allude to the extreme ranges of opinion concerning Halloween—both its fierce detractors, such as Jehovah's Witnesses, as well as its avid celebrants, such as Wiccans, whom consider the time in and around it a sacred holiday, or *sabbat*. Throughout the ethnography will be brief mentions of historical occurrences that have shaped the holiday nationally and here in the Atlanta, Georgia metropolitan area.

[4] However ethnically diverse the congregations I met and the trunk-or-treats I attended were, the entirety of my minister informants were white and rented or owned homes. All acknowledged middle to upper-middle class statuses.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 All that Once Lived Before

It is popularly believed that the Halloween many Americans observe is long-lived, and owes its descent to a mixture of pagan harvest rites celebrated across the European continent millennia ago (Bannatyne 2011:17; Santino 1994:xv; see Ellis 2011). The Celtic rites of Samhain, as well as the Roman festivals of Saturnalia and Pomona, are cited as some of the ancient celebrations that may have contributed to the holiday's provenance (Bannatyne 1990:14; Rogers 2002:11; Kelley 2008[1919]:3). Specialists in Halloween lore tend to infuse the holiday with indubitable authenticity, attributing the origin of the holiday's most prevalent rite—costumed trick-or-treating—to a harvest ritual enacted millennia ago by pagans (Bonewits 2006[1997]:1; Santino 1994:xiii; Rogers 2002:49–50). This ritual involved disguised adherents extending prestations of edible goods to the ethereal remnants of their recently departed, as well as to maligned entities who might invade their steads should they not be thusly sated. In later centuries, a similar rite, souling, was common. During this rite, Christian passers-by presented alms to the poor under the condition that prayer be said for the offerants' kin who may have passed aimlessly into the beyond, thereby ensuring their passage into heaven (Tuleja 1994:83–84; Bannatyne 1990:67).

Although both rituals had entailed guising and prestations of foodstuffs, I hesitate to concede that either directly informed Halloween's present-day ritualistic aspects. There is a long period of discontinuity, for instance, between guising to confound otherworldly spirits and the costuming for 'goodies' that is known today as trick-or-treating (see Tuleja 1994). Centuries have interceded since any performance rivaling trick-or-treating's codes of prestations might have taken place, unless one otherwise attributes its origins to mumming, caroling, or Guy Fawkes Day revelries (Santino 1994:xvii; Bannatyne 1990:40; Tuleja 1994:84). These festivities' pedigrees are distinctively British. In the US, only mumming and caroling remain; both endure, perhaps, as potential vestiges of Halloween's former formulae.[5]

[5] Curiously, though, they are associated with subsequent holidays—Thanksgiving and Christmas, respectively.

Thus, one cannot cursorily label trick-or-treat an 'old custom'. As Tecwyn Jones (1997:141) notes, "old customs are those whose function in the contemporary community is diminished … because they are no longer experienced on a daily or seasonal basis." Since most Americans' timekeeping with respect to agricultural cycles has long been supplanted by the industrialization of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and since most pagans had, for centuries, kept their rituals out of public spaces in order to avoid religious persecution, it is understandable that any possible customs of guising and prestation would have dissolved from the Western repertoire. Jones (1997:141) ventures further, opining that "customs become obsolete when they no longer function, and always they are recreated or invented when the need arises," yet I question whether an 'obsolete custom' would simply be re-invoked intact in its original form should something approaching its former functionality once again be required by members of its progenitorial society. As Handler and Linnekin (1984:273) write, "tradition cannot be defined in terms of boundedness, givenness, or essence: there can only be what is new, although what is new can take on symbolic value as 'traditional'." That which is deemed 'traditional' is merely discontinuous with the present, for, every moment, traditions enacted are defined anew. To imagine otherwise is to regard the society in question a stagnant entity and to consider its members bereft of both ingenuity and agency.

As historian Hobsbawm (1997:201) counsels, "Most history in the past was written for the glorification of, and[,] perhaps[,] for the practical use of, rulers." Literally, *Halloween* (*Hallowe'en* or *All Hallow's Eve*—its earliest American moniker) once plainly designated the evening prior to All Saints' Day, which the Roman Catholic Church had inserted into its current calendrical position in 731 C.E. to deter pagans that inhabited the Empire's lands from practicing their own harvest-timed festivals and sacrificial rites (Belk 1994:111). The Church deemed the pagans heretical and the gods they honored profane, thus offered another in their stead. All Saints' Day's November 1 insertion exemplifies how institutions and power structures—to borrow Bourdieu's (1977[1972]:193) phrase—"assemble … to reconcile the antagonists": they subjugate dissidents by addressing their cyclical rhythms; they make calculated efforts to govern their time.

Bourdieu (1977[1972]:91) would further warn that one should not consider the 'traditional' myth of Halloween or its rituals' provenance intact, for myth, as a product of the mind, is but "a metaphor of the world of objects which is itself but an endless circle of mutually reflecting metaphors." The world that each individual perceives, as with any lifeway a human could follow, is structured according to subjectively formulated rules and relationships both projected and shared. Although the stimuli and the subsequent perceptions both reflect and are reflected in the culture(s) to which the individual belongs, they are still, yet, unique for each individual that holds them. That is to say, October 31, All Hallow's Eve, did, as a matter of simple incidence, come into being when All Saints' Day was instituted, but this, in itself, does not mean anyone was there to observe it. Pagans and others throughout the Roman Empire likely continued to follow their own grassroots harvest-themed rites—at their own times and in their own spaces—until they were sanctioned forcibly to do otherwise. Likewise, present-day celebrants of Halloween sculpt out new territories for Halloween's rituals. It is thusly and always that "ordinary people become a constant factor in the making of … decisions and events" (Hobsbawm 1997:202).

2.2 Practice Theory

Conceptualizing the processual aspects of Halloween rituals through frameworks such as Bourdieu's (1977[1972]) *habitus*, or even through his, Sahlins' (1981) or Ortner's (2006) *practice*, one must employ knowledge of the 'socially informed body'. The 'socially informed body' is the orientation of the 'self' in time and space, embedded as it is in its culture(s), its environment, and the negotiations for its needs among others' behavioral inclinations. Although it would please me personally to include a more phenomenological slant in my approach to this concept, *a la embodiment* (see Merleau-Ponty 2004; Csordas 1990), my intent for the exploration at hand is not concerned with the intricacies of sensory experience, but with the unifying processes through which enculturated individuals and corporate entities *re*-embody their culture by consulting familiar mental structures previously available to them and applying them intentionally in ritual. Such processes resonate with Sahlins' (1981) notion that ritual practitioners

consult extant historical structures and map them onto inchoate ritual enactments in order to make sense of new events and assimilate them into their histories.

Bourdieu conceives of a 'socially informed body' similarly, yet, in his case, it is that of an *individual* who "organizes the vision of the world" through "cognitive and evaluative structures" (1977[1972]:124). Whereas Bourdieu (1977[1972]), on the one hand, theorizes that these structures emanate from prevalent cultural forces that tend to predispose members of a culture toward certain sets of actions covertly, Ortner (2006:5, 148–151), on the other, emphasizes individual agency, and attributes to each social actor complete cognizance of the forces that oppose their wills. She cites situational confounds to the *habitus* in the form of 'serious games', in which unforeseen eventualities tend to wrest from both the agent and the overlying cultural structure (the *habitus*) any design for complete control of outcomes that might come about during and after ritual enactments. Practice, in such a view, takes on the guise of a continuously unfolding 'happy accident'.

The past may "legitimize[]," but it does not supersede the agencies of cultural agents when negotiating their present states (Hobsbawm 1997:5). This enterprise is left to their tastes and to their dispositions, as well as to chance—unforeseeable incidents that occur as their rites unravel. As Ortner (2006:149) submits, "games do change." Ritual participants, particularly in the public sphere, are always encountering elements new and incipient in real-time during their ritual's execution. Players immersed in social arenas are continually faced with chance occurrences; they are confounded by the willful executions of others sharing in the same game. Such are the "externalities" intrinsic to the game that "may prove indigestible precisely because they empower some of the normally subordinated subjects, and open up the possibility of rebellions, great and small" (Ortner 2006:149). Thus, the outcome of the game can never be ascertained in prospect. Instead, the process, having played out, could give rise to a 'turn-around'.[6]

[6] Bourdieu (1977[1972]:8–9), also, acknowledges time as a confound to generative schemes of practice; here, too, however, his envisioning of *tempo* is structured, and somewhat forestalls purely accidental occurrences.

Sociologist Catherine Bell (1997:78) aptly conveys Bourdieu's cognizance of rituals as "strategic practices for transgressing and reshuffling cultural categories in order to meet the needs of real situations." Liminality—the concept of an aberrant transitional phase through which individuals are transformed by their having been "betwixt and between" social states—floats implicitly in Bourdieu's musings: Kabyle "ritual licenses … violations even as it reinforces the underlying sense of order that violation transgresses" (Turner 1964:7–8; Bell 1997:78). By way of the contrary actions of Kabyle marriage (combining) and plowing (splitting), for instance, the sacred and profane are licensed to inhabit the same space and their mutual separation is fortified (Bell 1997:78). Correspondingly, as Meyer (2006:132) has offered, when blasphemous imagery or material forms are allowed ingress to sacred ritual spaces, the very violations they pose can stir stout feelings of devoutness. Kugelmass (1994:21) also shows how the Greenwich Village Halloween Parade provides a "festival setting to bring the 'saints' and 'devils' of popular culture—from Shirley Temple to Saddam Hussein—down to earth, to worship, to befriend, or debunk." As my Christian informants will have, perhaps, demonstrated by the end of this work, through trunk-or-treats, the sacrilegious sting of what were once irreverent transgressions—the Halloween holiday and its associated paraphernalia—has been successfully softened by harnessing the liminality licensed by the season and by manipulating, and deploying, its sensual appurtenances via ritual.

Other threats have been diffused by the establishment of trunk-or-treat rituals. Beyond such spectacularized gala, and much closer to home, 'urban legends' have haunted Halloween trick-or-treating's pubic presence in Atlanta for decades. The 'razor blade in the apple' legend, for example, in which trick-or-treaters' candies are tainted to cause ingestees harm, contrasts with the gaiety typically licensed by Halloween. Such urban legends are manifestations of "social strain" (Best and Horiuchi 1985:489); they are warnings inscribed in mythic narrative.

Accordingly, for nearly half a century now, there has been reluctance on the part of parents, guardians, and community leaders toward allowing their children to participate in trick-or-treat's public ritual procession; there is a marked hesitancy on some homeowners' part to open their doors to trick-or-treaters. Many fear, or are unsure of, just who is beneath the guise. Similarly, parents of trick-or-treaters

are concerned whether something insidious lurks within their children's candies. Therefore, corporate groups have taken it upon themselves either to regulate these festivities' extant forms, or to negotiate with those in their communities for alternative ones they have contrived, be they Simon Mall's Kidgit's 'Boo Bashes'—or trunk-or-treats—on Halloween eve. Efforts are taken to fashion innovative festivities to suit their corporate needs (see Belk 1994; see Grider 1996).

Boundaries—physical, temporal, and figurative—stand as metaphorical extensions of "social action" (Pellow 1996:2; Hall 1969); they are thusly instituted to enable surveillance and to promote innocuous Halloween play. According to Low (2004:10), "gates and walls … provide a rationale for the inconsistencies of everyday life." Although it is true that some exercise what Low (2004:10; see Newman 1996) calls a "fortress mentality" and seek to establish safe and defensible spaces in their urban environments for Halloween rituals, for the Christian churches and ministries I interviewed, other reasons exist for constructing events like trunk-or-treats: the building of congregations, the embracing of ubiquitous symbolic systems, and the spreading of the Christian faith. It is the intent of this study to explore who these groups and individuals are, as well as why and how they initiate trunk-or-treat rituals in and around Halloween. I consider them "skilled strategists" who, in the act of confronting what they consider threats and challenges, turn their events and rituals into "instruments of power," and enable themselves to approximate just the culture they "'need'" (Bourdieu 1979:81; Riesman 2010[1950]:329).

A ritual, by my own reckoning, is a performance through which an individual or groups' collective sense of cosmology—often that stemming from tradition—is brought to the fore in a series of acts that are intended to achieve a desired result. Rituals enacted in public space during national holidays such as Halloween empower all members of society to negotiate their unique, sometimes contradictory, value systems with those of other members. For others, such rituals may "reaffirm[] at regular intervals the collective sentiments and the collective ideas" that promote accord (Lukes 1975:56). In the urban environment, such negotiations and reaffirmations enable ritual participants and bystanders alike to sculpt their turf according to their own dispositions. Bereft of any fixed historicity, Halloween rituals' potency resides

in their malleability. Through them, social actors are free to negotiate and innovate nascent ritual structures that loosely embody their ontologies.

2.3 Material Religion and Ambient Faith: Spanning the Public–Private Divide

Meyer *et al*. (2010:209) have written about how material things are tangled up with the sensual expression of religion: the utility, appraisal, and attractiveness of things—particularly when shared by a religious collective—can open up communicative channels among adherents and, for that matter, extend beyond them. It is in this way, writes Meyer (2006:129), that "sensational forms do not only convey particular ways of 'making sense' but concomitantly tune the senses and induce specific sensations, thereby rendering the divine sense-able, and triggering particular religious experiences." Following these threads of reasoning, the Christian hosts of trunk-or-treats, through the inclusive physicality of the material Halloween accouterments present during their rituals, lend themselves to perpetuating their flavor of religiosity. I return to this below.

As Meyer (2006:127) has further conveyed, "the divine does not appear as a self-revealing entity, but … is always 'effected' or 'formed' by mediation processes, while resisting being reduced to mere human-made products." That is, the meaning evoked within an individual—or collection of individuals, for that matter—upon sensory detection of an object or image hinges upon inculcated knowledge, both prior and present, such as that which comes with religious socialization into a specific denomination or faith (Meyer 2006:129). It is in this way that theological ornamentation can stir resolute feelings of reverence or piety; it is in this way, too, that an image or figurine of a devil, for instance, might only represent a maligned effigy if the perceiver thereby warrants, and is ever free to be furnished with alternate meaning[s].

Thus, it is that *material religion*, as an epistemological field of inquiry, roots social analysis in the expressive physicality of its target culture. It is a manner of looking at the social world that strives to parse the semiotic distinctions of, and connections between, humans and their things. When material religion is wedded to the notions of backgrounding in spatial contexts and the public–private aspects of

evangelistic religions, a union ensues—what Engelke (2012:155–156) called *ambient faith*. I thereby call forth two notions of context that concern not the written page, but, instead, confer a sense of area unto spatial and acoustical environments. Paraphrasing composers John Cage and Erik Satie, musician Brian Eno (1975; see Nyman 1973:1229), on the outer-sleeve art of his album, *Discreet Music*, penned that he had theorized a music that would "mingle with the sound of the knives and forks at dinner." The result would be what he termed 'ambient music'. Correspondingly, anthropologist Engelke (2012), seeking to expound upon his Christian informants' (the Bible Society) efforts to imbue seemingly innocuous Christmas decorations with ministerial utility, transposed Eno's aesthetic ramblings into discourse concerning the spatio-cultural[7] world that surrounds us—a place filled with the things we can see, hear, and touch. Realizing that the public at large "does not like to be preached at," the evangelistic Bible Society embarked on an art installation-esque project to disseminate their Christian message (Engelke 2012:157). Rather than fill their allotted ceiling space in a public mall with provocative mobiles of floating angels blatantly emblematic of Christianity, the Bible Society opted, instead, to give their angels an amorphous quality—one that would bathe viewers with but a bare wisp of religiosity. The soaring angel effigies blended seamlessly with the mall's surroundings, imperceptively produced a sermonizing, yet sensually charged, public sphere, and begot Engelke's (2012:156) ambient faith.

At Christian trunk-or-treats, just as gore and mugwort are scant, so is the flagrant proselytization some might expect preeminent at a church event. Churches have unwittingly opted to take the ambient faith route in hosting these events, compromisingly, yet effectively, communing with the public and participants from a mediatized position. To promote their brand of spiritualism at these events, they borrow not from their own proprietary stock of materialized symbols (crucifixes and Marian statues, for example), but from the commoditized realm of Halloween ephemera (skeletons, witches, goblins, and ghosts, to name a few). Albeit modified to suit the Christian hosts' needs, the latter have now become part and parcel of these Christians' expressions of faith, just as they had been claimed by the public populace at

[7] For discussions of the military application that bears the name of this term, Spatio-Cultural Abductive Reasoning Engine, or SCARE-2, see Shakarian *et al*. (2009) and Shakarian *et al*. (2011).

large. A syncretic material religion, specific to Halloween and trunk-or-treats, is thusly, exemplified and ordained.

3 METHODOLOGY

At the onset of this study, I took to reviewing a body of literature through which I could explore how Halloween has been celebrated in America, particularly in the South and the regions of Atlanta where I would perform my study. I sought to elicit some sense of the holiday's trajectory from the past, to evince some sense of how it is popularly beheld. Newspapers and magazines as far back as the eighteenth century have been voraciously examined. I also consulted primetime television documentaries, and so-called 'coffee-table books' to ascertain what information pertaining to the holiday would be readily available to those who would volunteer in my study.

Much of the work I encountered consistently referred to Halloween and its attendant ritual, trick-or-treat, as immutable 'traditions'. While reviewing them, I thought of Handler and Linnekin (1984:273–274), who propose that "Western common sense … presumes that an unchanging core of ideas is always handed down to us from the past," and that "tradition resembles less an artificial assemblage than a process of thought—an ongoing interpretation of the past." I concede to my own situatedness in a Eurocentric Western culture such as the US and, as a fanatic of the holiday for forty years, noted there were tendencies on my part to place too much emphasis on vernacular histories that cast Halloween's rituals as static traditions.

Halloween rituals, such as trunk-or-treat, turn place into space to be effective. As Rosenbaum and Lavrakas (1995:288) point out, "studies of place will have little explanatory value unless researchers examine the social processes that occur within these physical environments." Thus, this exploration of trunk-or-treat rituals has relied solely on information provided by adult volunteers, eighteen-years or older, who reside in north- and southeastern counties around Atlanta, Georgia. All volunteers for my study—referred to as *informants* throughout this paper—were familiar with long-standing US American Hallow-

een customs; all but one—a Jehovah's Witness—observed the holiday. Although it might seem to have been a difficult task, especially for a study that explores a ritual that tends to feature youths as its centerpiece, neither children nor minors were approached for purposes of data collection.

I utilized two methods of ethnographic inquiry: participant observations and in-depth interviews. Nine informants were interviewed; all were church ministers. Two informants were Baptists; four were Methodists; one was Presbyterian and two were from independent, non-denominational churches. Four of their churches were observed during their trunk-or-treats. These events took place at their workplaces—on the grounds and parking lots adjacent to their church buildings. Interactions with these informants took place in-person, by telephone and through online means, via instant messaging systems, and through social networking websites and email. Code names were established for each participant in this study prior to our interaction. All information pertaining to, or provided by, informants has been kept confidential and coded. Pseudonyms, and not informants' real names, appear here in the study. The names of the churches have been changed, as well. The study has shown a potential for touching upon culturally sensitive topics, such as racism, the infra-neighborhood politics of informants, and socioeconomic stratification; thus, I wish to protect the identities of the locations, individuals, and entities that will have provided commentary in order to maintain their current reputations and to keep peace in their respective communities.

I opted to not include a survey in this study. Due to my preconceived notions regarding the limits of informants' typing skills and patience, as well as the paucity of available space allotted for survey responses, I imagine a survey would have been best suited to elicit quantitative data and would have not enabled me the opportunity to immediately follow up with questions that might have arisen from their replies. An informant might have misconstrued a question due to my being unavailable at the critical moment when they needed clarification since, as Spradley (1979:82) offers, "questions and answers come from two different meaning systems." Had they failed to respond to a survey prompt or had I noted that the answer I received was incongruent with the question, I would have been unable to follow up on the query using subsequent methods, as the survey tools available to me at no cost would have been anony-

mous. I, therefore, relied on face-to-face interviews and observations to provide me the majority of my qualitative data.

For example, during interviews I have asked informants questions like "What does the arrival of the Halloween season signal to you and your church?" and "Describe how the trunk-or-treat activities you host throughout the Halloween season unfold." I have followed up on these queries with questions concerning what their Halloween activities entail, whom they are intended for and who participates in them, and how informants prepare for them. I also asked informants whether they imagine that their trunk-or-treat rituals serve some type of function for them—whether they enable informants to attain some sort of goal. Informants were not inclined toward analyzing the *whys* and *what fors* of their involvement in these activities; thus, sometimes, such inquiries have been met with confusion. I have, therefore, needed to fine-tune my questions for later interviews in order to achieve better clarity for subsequent informants and those I had initially confused.

Questions posed during the trunk-or-treat observations had included several from the interview, but most were impromptu. Asking questions during the observations was difficult, as informants were often busy seeing the ritual or event through and not available for comment. I, too, participated in the activities at length; thus, I was unable, for the most part, to ask questions or take notes during them. When I did take notes during the rituals and events, I experienced a bit of discomfort: I imagined my presence intrusive on several occasions for, as Ervin (2005:101) writes, "for those about to be evaluated, the prospect can be very threatening." I felt, sometimes, as if my presence had made informants self-conscious. Although, in all instances, the explanation for my presence was circulated and widely known, participants still seemed curious and intent to know what I was writing on my clipboard. Some, at times, seemed concerned—as if something they had done had caught my attention and was being noted accordingly. Therefore, to lessen reactivity, and in order to engage informants more fully, I took sparse notes during subsequent observations and compiled in-depth commentaries immediately after them, instead.

The interviews lasted for brief durations—three hours at the most—and occurred on one or more occasions with the same person. This allowed for subsequent investigations into certain topics that had

come up during initial meetings, as well as for inquiries concerning eventualities that had arisen during the observations. Observations took up to six hours at a time and entailed attending face-to-face meetings or online discussions while informants plan and prepare for their trunk-or-treating events. I participated in the trunk-or-treats, myself; thus, observations took place during these times, as well. One of my duties as a volunteer, for example, had been to review children's movies while at home, making sure that certain words, images, or symbols were not featured in them.[8]

Interviews, but not observations, have been audio recorded whenever possible. Hand-written notes, for the most part, were taken while interviews and observations commenced. When audio recording or immediate note taking was not feasible, notes were hand-written or typed immediately after the interviews or observations.

As with any ethnographic endeavor, there were several challenges encountered in this study. My initial intent was to study several Halloween-timed activities that churches, schools, and neighborhoods sponsor, yet I found individuals from both the schools and neighborhood governments I approached unable to sign my consent forms, likely due to their positions in their bureaucratic structures. Conversely, I found churches, religious groups, and other private organizations quite receptive to this study. Thus, I shifted my ethnographic focus to these entities, although I continued to interview individuals, such as teachers, who live in the unincorporated neighborhoods I had intended to include in this study.

This shift has proven itself somewhat difficult in several ways. First, I had desired a place-centered ethnography; that is, I had intended for this study to take place within a limited geographic area of Atlanta, such as Decatur. However, some of the churches and ministries were located a good distance away from me and from one another. They were situated in areas that varied somewhat in terms of socio-economic wealth. Thus, my informants' experiences with Halloweenish rituals differed a great deal. I, therefore, widened the geographic focus of my research to encompass north- and southeastern Atlanta.

[8] Portrayals and mentions of "ghosts and spirits," in particular, were of great concern for one minister, Dana, for whom I reviewed a bevy of Halloween-themed *The Wind in the Willows* episodes.

Another obstacle presented by this shift has been that the types of events that my informants have participated in have almost solely been trunk-or-treats. I had hoped to explore more of a variety of events and rituals, but, with this shift, I realized my scope had been too wide. I, thus, embraced the opportunity to become familiar with this type of event and adjusted my thesis' foci accordingly. For example, according to some of my informants, their events are only loosely connected to Halloween. Hence, I have needed to tailor my questionnaires for the interviews accordingly. I altered the wording of my questions so that they would reflect the particularities of any one event, inserted among each set of questions prompts concerning the event's cost and estimated attendance, and made inquiries into the various modes of surveillance present, as well as the events' inclusivities and exclusivities. I have since participated in three trunk-or-treats as a volunteer, and have attended one as a guest. Overall, I have spent a great deal of time collaborating on the planning and execution of several trunk-or-treat events and have had the opportunity to interact with hundreds of participants one-on-one during them.

I turn now to discuss what Adkins (2003:25) proposes to be the "the uncovering of unthought and unconscious categories of habit which are themselves *corporealized* preconditions of our more self-conscious practice"—*reflexivity*. I have needed to reflect upon how my identity and the identities of my informants would mingle, particularly in terms of gender, regional nationalism, and religiosity. For example, all of my informants were women, and all have grown up in the South. As a male ethnographer who hails from the North, I wonder whether my masculinity or my 'Yankee' roots affected my informants in any way. I have heard from some women who were informants that they consider the 'relatability of personal experience' to affect their responses when they and their interviewers are of different genders. Further, despite the fact that the former acrimony between the North and the South has generally diminished to humorous proportions, I am curious whether either my gender or my birthplace—as revealed by my Philadelphia accent—have instigated any reactivity on their part. My considerable personal experiences with certain senior southerners have alerted me to the fact that there is still some lingering resentment among some US Southerners toward US Northerners.

My informants have had busy schedules, yet they have been quite generous with their time. They have provided me maps and inventory lists they had drawn up in advance of their events. These documents have enabled me a bird's-eye view of the grounds where these events take place; they convey entrances, exits, and other boundaries the organizations propose to establish for the event. Kohn (2004:7–8) proposes that "by structuring people's perceptions, interactions, and dispositions, spatial practices and architectural markers can mitigate or intensify ingrained social dynamics." I adhere to this tenet, and have examined these maps as well as the landscapes informants have designed for their rituals accordingly.

I may have encountered a challenge with several of my Christian informants—one that has hindered my efforts to engender a deeper rapport with them. Some were apt to ask me what faith I am and what church I attend. When I informed them that I neither follow an organized faith nor attend any Christian church I, at times, noted a moment of curious, if not awkward, silence. My reply was often met with an invitation to their masses. I sometimes accepted these invitations, but found myself unable to keep regular appointments. Out of respect for their churches, and as a former Christian who entertains what they might consider pagan beliefs, I believed it appropriate to abstain from being part of their Christian rituals. Thus, other than regretting my coyness when responding to their initial questions, I wonder whether my reluctance to join them for prayer might have induced some sort of hesitancy on the part of church informants to participate in this study.

Anthropological collaborations are two-way streets: informants were likely investigating me, as well. Several of the studies I performed during my Master's training concerned pagans, Wiccans, and their belief systems. Some of the interviews were performed over social networking sites. The Google search engine had records of them stored in its cache. Had an informant searched my name on the internet, they would have found me conversing with some pagan and Wiccan groups with which I am affiliated. I worry this may have turned off some informants from answering me candidly about their views concerning Halloween and their trunk-or-treat rituals.

I have questioned my own motives for pursuing this study since it began. Since "anthropologists systematically and rigorously reveal their methodology and themselves as the instrument of data genera-

tion," I wonder whether my romantic zeal for Halloween's ritualized conventions or my spiritualist leanings might have 'colored' my approach or affect my findings (Ruby 1980:153). However, I no longer worry whether my personal convictions have caused me to be resistant to seeing the world as my informants do, for I feel changed since undertaking this study. As per my anthropological training, I am relieved to have found that I, quite plainly, find my informants and their ritualized articulations filled with efficacious ingenuity and beauty. What at first glance appeared as a privatized defanging of an otherwise venomous public rite now reveals itself as a useful strategy of praxis.

My informants have willingly sacrificed considerable amounts of time speaking with me, sharing with me how they feel about their communities and their roles in them, and 'showing me the ropes' when it comes time for their trunk-or-treat rituals. All of this they have done without tangible remuneration on my part. Although "theoretical links lie between the anthropologist's experiential, embodied knowledge, its continuing resonances[,] and the ultimate printed text," I aim to reciprocate informants' generosity in full with an honest and credible work that brings them and their practices forth with indefatigable fidelity (Okely 2005[1992]:23). Ironically, the hyperreality—the artificial array of exaggerated simulation that typically surrounds Halloween and its rituals—might have served to confound this goal: I am aware that what I encountered of informants were but ephemeral facets of their more permanent guises (Baudrillard 2006[1981]:1–3).

4 ETHNOGRAPHY

Trunk-or-treats began to appear in the Atlanta region during the Halloween season of 1997, two years after syndicated newspaper columnist Ann Landers' report that poison and razors had once again resurfaced in children's Halloween candies, harming "hundreds of children" nationally with each October 31 celebration (Atlanta Journal and Constitution 1997:07R; Landers 1995:8). As if in partial response, on the eve of Halloween 1997, at a Methodist church in Conyers, church members decorated their vehicles, parked them in the lot of their church, and handed out candies to children under the watchful eyes of par-

ents and other trusted adults (Atlanta Journal and Constitution 1997:07R). This and other area events were likely instituted to stem the alleged rise in *Halloween sadism*—the intentional harming of children through tainted Halloween edibles (see Best and Horiuchi 1985).

However, Tribulation Trails, fall festivals, and other events had already been around in the Atlanta region for years. Their hosts were, for the most part, Christian churches who wanted an alternative to the "pagan appeal" of trick-or-treat (Young 1997:01R). These alternative events were slated for Halloween night during the hours customarily allotted trick-or-treating and devised in order to prevent Christian children from partaking in what was to them a controversial, somewhat maligned, secular ritual.

Years have passed, and trunk-or-treat events now dot the Atlantan cityscape in and around Halloween, sometimes as far as a week on either side of the holiday. Baptists, for example, tend to reserve the event for Wednesdays; Methodists reserve a Saturday or Sunday for such events. No longer slated as trick-or-treat alternatives, trunk-or-treats are timed for whatever would be the churches' customary gathering days, no matter what the actual date that Halloween, October 31, falls upon.

Trunk-or-treats are not only hosted by Baptists or Methodists. Many denominational and independent churches, alike, take pleasure in planning the events. During my study, for example, I interviewed members and ministers from two Baptist churches, two Methodist churches, one Presbyterian church, and one independent church that sponsor them, and noted the events hosted by Catholics and Episcopalians, alike. Many Americans belonging to these denominations have long been celebrating Halloween, at least since the holiday's reported "revival" in the 1880s (*Daily Inter Ocean* 1889:7E). The Victorian Age fervor of small-scale parlor tricks, such as girls peering in mirrors by candlelight to spot their future husbands on Halloween night, has since ceded to large-scale fall festivals, commercialized haunted houses, and, of course, community-based trick- and trunk-or-treats.

The trunk-or-treats I have encountered and participated in took place during the daylight hours and on private church grounds, usually in church parking lots and upon their adjacent lawns. There were physical boundaries encircling these events, often stationary cars, fences, or brightly colored tapes or fil-

aments that were affixed to florescent orange construction pylons. These were strategically emplaced as to impede a child's crossing into public roads and driveways.[9]

The landscapes encompassing trunk-or-treats were vibrantly hued. They featured games and rides for the children, such as bowling and bouncy houses. Although these events were called trunk-or-treats, the additions of games, live and pre-recorded music, and store-bought and prepared foods, gave them the sheen of a full-out fall festival.

The events lasted anywhere from one-and-a-half to two hours; however, the trunk-or-treat rituals, themselves, lasted no more than half-an-hour. During the trunk-or-treat rituals, children would parade from stationary vehicle to stationary vehicle, sometimes along a route predetermined by the adult hosts. All of the vehicles' trunks were bedecked with Halloween decorations; some vehicles were decorated in their entirety; some ornamentation revolved around themes: one pick-up was transformed into an ice-cream truck; one hatchback became a hippie den. In either case, all vehicles' owners were equipped with edible gifts for the children, be they candies or other store-bought treats. Proxy pencils and religious tracts were nowhere to be seen.

Children might pause briefly at each vehicle or choose to pick from the parked array. When they found a vehicle at which they wished to stop, they sometimes entreated, "Trick-or-treat," or, more rarely, "Trunk-or-treat." The vehicle's owner[s]—be they Smurf or Aquaman or everyman—would then confer a treat to the child or to an adult escort.

For every three to five children there was typically one adult monitoring the event or hovering nearby. All the children I saw wore costumes; most of the adults accompanying them did not. Adults tended to stand behind their children and—depending on the child's age—would allow the child to speak freely and request treats on their own behalf.

Beyond this surface description, I endeavor to show how trunk-or-treats serve deep sociological functions. Trunk-or-treats empower Christian churches to pastoralize their nearby communities and to

[9] In 1997, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (1997:987), cars were four times more likely to strike a child on Halloween night than any other night of the year.

bolster their ranks, and also enable them to internalize seemingly incompatible symbolic systems—those of the commercial holiday marketplace and those temporal and material constructs that are oft cited to be pagan in origin. In addition, through trunk-or-treats, churches can extend to their congregants and participants safe havens from crime, all the while furthering the spread of God's word. From what I have seen, from what I have been told, all have fun in the process.

The churches whose ministers I interviewed were situated outside of the heart of Atlanta, in small satellite towns and neighborhoods surrounding it. Some were as far as thirty miles north from Atlanta's center. Watery Run Baptist was one of these. It and Ephesus First Baptist, which was but several miles from Atlanta's core, commanded expansive properties, and were replete with modular four-story buildings, lawns, and connective walkways that afforded them the appearance of college campuses. On the other hand, Bridge of Souls, a non-denominational church in Duluth, and Bromwich and Nativity United Methodist churches, in Conyers and Kennesaw, respectively, were compact. Each had a singular main building with one floor and lawns that took up just over an acre. Wood Chapel United Methodist existed in the middle of this continuum, having three connected buildings with two floors and an expansive parking lot and playground, both enclosed with gates.

The "neighborhood" of Watery Run Baptist came across as not a neighborhood at all. Surrounded by pristine four-lane roads and recently built ritzy shopping centers, the church was proximal only to two residential enclaves whose walls were camouflaged by high bushes and lush crepe myrtles. Similarly, Ephesus First Baptist was emplaced in a section of the city whose upper and middle-upper class residents shell out upward of a million dollars for their homes. Independent church, Bridge of Souls, too, resided in a well-to-do suburban environment. Navigating around it while killing time for an interview, I spied humongous mansions spaced city blocks apart, some in skeletal states of being built; but one commercial property—a gas station—populated the nearby expanse. Permit me to relay the impact of Wood Chapel United Methodist's sight thusly: picturesque. Beset in a grove of trees and packed into a cluster of slate-roofed homes, the church had triggered in me the sense of a de-snowed version of an Alpine chalet.

Nativity United Methodist's church sat on top of a hill. Gravel roads snaked up to it—one toward a low-lying office building, and one toward its diminutive chapel. Grasses radiated out one hundred yards in all directions until they reached the yards of a handful of modest and middle-class homes below.

Despite how rural Bromwich United Methodist's and Grace Presbyterian's environs were, the two-lane roads that bordered them were somewhat littered with debris, both human-made (lottery slips and paper cups) and natural (dry red soils and detritus from the scraggly and overgrown brush that lined some of the nearby roads). In Bromwich's case, the former likely stemmed from the malls, shopping centers, and fast food joints but two miles from the lower to middle class homes across the road from the church; in Grace Presbyterian's case, the former was less severe, yet, perhaps, due to the fact that the church was located along a long expanse of road that connected two distant and populous town centers.

My drives to the churches that participated in this study took anywhere from five to forty-five minutes. During them, I never forgot that Atlanta loomed nearby. However rural some of the roads I travelled upon might have been, the continuous flicker of sparse mailboxes kept me in touch with the beating heart of a Southern suburbia.

4.1 Prologue: 'Be a Light' … As Disciples of Jesus

For centuries, many Christians have considered the Halloween season rife with demonic sources. Its occasion has been termed "a religious holiday for the underworld" (Kelley 1990:3A). I shall first present one of the more extreme Christian viewpoints to counter Halloween and then locate the holiday within a historical fundamentalist Christian framework to illustrate how a vilified countenance might serve to efface it. I seek to show why—as if reactively—some churches craft trunk-or-treat rituals in their efforts to infuse the "darkness" of the season with the "light of Jesus."

In the September 27, 2011 episode of *700 Club*, Christian Broadcast Network founder, Pat Robertson, declared All Hallow's Eve "Satan's night … the night of the devil" (Robertson 2012[2011]; see Summers 2011). Citing the holiday's cultural accoutrements as "ersatz entertainment," Robertson—despite the steadfast beliefs Christians have in the afterlife, the Holy Ghost, and Jesus' resurrection—

stated that Christians "don't believe in ghosts" and should beware of artifacts and images that depict the "dead rising" (Robertson (2012[2011]). His statements came after a viewer had expressed how "unsettling" it was that his church hosts a haunted house every year (Robertson 2012[2011]). Robertson shamed the viewer and his church for doing so.

Admittedly, Robertson's is a conservative stance among Christians, and one not shared among all adherents to the faith. The majority of my informants, for example, chose to partake of Halloween diversions in at least one form or another. Such levity in the presence of what one of my informants called a "dark holiday" has reportedly been the case among some Christians in Atlanta at least since 1892, when it was observed that harmless pagan idolatry had long ceded to innocent, commercialized custom (N.a.a 1892:5).

Further, Robertson's comment, 'Satan's night,' might sound extreme to most, but how did Halloween become associated with darkness, evil, and their provincial Prince in the minds of many? One must travel as far back as the fourth century, when Saint Basil (1981[1963]:30), in an exegesis on 1 John 1:5, expressed, "the earthly darkness existed in consequence of the shadow of the heavenly body." If considered from an anthropomorphic perspective, Saint Basil's metonyms, *darkness* and *body*, might render the personages of Satan and God, respectively.[10] Moreover, the phrasing of the passage to which it refers intimates how Satan—Lucifer, the devil—became associated with darkness and evil: the goodness of God's light had once shone to Lucifer, but the devil refused it; thus, metaphorically, he would evermore "embrace[] darkness" (Ekirch 2005:16).

In the eyes of the ancient Catholic Church, Satan would subsequently be party to the pagan celebrations that were taking place around Saint Basil's time, parlaying his guiles as the thirteenth guest of the twelve-strong female coven during sabbats and Samhain—the oft-cited precursor of Halloween. It was not until the late Roman Empire, with the endorsed abandonment of polytheism in favor of Christianity, that pagan feasts and holidays came to be seen as a threat to the Church. With the shift of All Saints' Day

[10] See 1 John 1:5: "And the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not" (N.a.b N.d.a:79). The use of *comprehended* perhaps affords a humanistic interpretation of this biblical passage.

to its present date, the Church had hoped the Samhain revelry abated, absorbed by All Saints' inclusion of commemorations for the dead.[11]

Throughout the subsequent centuries, along the timeline of the often murderous witch-craze, any non-Christian practices occurring in and around October 31 were deemed heretical and punishable by death. Festive gatherings at this time signaled idolatry in legion with Satan to the ecclesiastical authorities on the part of participants. Hence, for some Christians, a proverbial darkness pervades Halloween.

The foregoing explanation, particularly in light of conservative Christian, Robertson's, position, presages this reading's relevance for a number of Christians today. Through trunk-or-treat events, some churches—Catholic, Protestant, and otherwise—extend their "light" to stem the "darkness" that they attribute to this particular provenance of the holiday. By offering their contemporaneous rituals in lieu of those that typically accompany Halloween, some highly conservative trunk-or-treating churches endeavor to span the licentious dark divide that separates good from evil.

4.2 'Be a Light' … As Disciples of Jesus

My informants, I discovered, do not subscribe to the severity of Robertson's point of view concerning Halloween, and welcomed the holiday in varying degrees. For the most part, they found the holiday innocuous, save some of the more threatening aspects of its attendant symbolism—the ghosts, the devils and demons, and the blood and gore. It enabled several of them to harken back to their childhoods, when they, themselves, were trick-or-treating; for others, however, trick-or-treat was not in their purview. Take, for example, white ministers Tara and Iris: minister Tara, although currently a Methodist, was brought up Southern Baptist and not allowed to trick-or-treat; minister Iris has been a Baptist her entire life, yet, having been brought up in a conservative church in West Virginia, has had limited experience with the trick-or-treat ritual. Kendra, a white and middle-aged minister at Nativity United Methodist

[11] Pagan Wiccan rituals during Samhain typically include what is known as a *dumb supper*, whereupon a table is set up adorned with foodstuffs and mementoes of those who have passed away in the foregoing year. Ritual participants take turns standing before this table to impart remembrances to their fallen and to dispense with personal regrets.

Church, remembers that congregants at her church had always shunned representations of ghosts and jack-o'-lanterns at Halloween time.

Minister Tiffany, from Grace Presbyterian church, is one of the youngest and least conservative ministers I encountered. White and in her early twenties, she has fond memories of Halloween from childhood. Sitting on a cushy L-shaped couch in her high-ceilinged office, surrounded by a rainbow assortment of toys, books, and maps, we commenced our interview. When asked what her main vision was for Grace Presbyterian's *Halloween Fall Festival and Trunk-or-Treat*, she claimed, "We definitely wanna be a light, but our number one goal is just one of service. We want to imitate Jesus. He was a servant. He just served everybody. That's going to be our goal—in spreading the principle." She was visibly enthused by this prospect, as might be surmised from the smile on her face when she spoke the following: "We need to be out in that culture being that light—just showing that fellowship like Jesus." What that meant for her and her congregants was to leave the confines of their church building and sanctuary on an off-day and join in the parking lot with the public for the Halloween-themed event Tiffany designed and named.

She met resistance to the event while planning it, she told me. Some of the "older folks" in Tiffany's church were hesitant to associate their trunk-or-treat with the Halloween holiday. These congregants did not want the 'H- word'—*Halloween*—anywhere near the term, *trunk-or-treat*, on the signs and advertising. Doing so, they thought, would denigrate the benign force of the event, which was to unite the public at large with the light of God's Word. However, Tiffany disagreed with such censorship, feeling that it was critical to meld the culture of her church with that of the secular and to express that fusion through the event's name:

> I think that goes back to thinking about what is it about Halloween that makes the church uncomfortable and what is our job in educating people on what is Halloween really […] I think that's something that a lot of churches probably struggle with. But I think if we really go back and look at what, exactly, *is* Halloween, it's not what have we made it. Really, we could do that with any holiday: Christmas—'Oh, it's all about Santa, so we probably shouldn't support that and not say Santa's name at all' […] You can't do that. And so I think that, as a church, [instead of] being against stuff and putting our foot down against it we need to be more proactive and educational—bringing light to what it really is. I

> think it's great to pair the church with cultural things. Our faith is supposed to be how we *live*. And so we can't separate those two things. And if we do, we're going to continue to create a culture that goes to church and acts one way on Sunday and then lives a completely different life.

Most of Tiffany's concern revolves not around the darkness some in her Christian community associate with the holiday, but with others in her congregation that aim to keep their children in the dark about what goes on outside the boundaries of their church's tightly knit social circle. The "light" for her, thus, also represented a mental form of illumination. She believed it critical to inform children of what *Halloween* really designates—that is, that the holiday's name stems from a holy day that the church had instituted to worship saints living and dead. She opined that most church parents are desirous of keeping their children in "little bubbles"—isolated from mainstream American culture. However, I was fortunate enough to have met one exception: a teenaged girl I met during our interview exemplifies Tiffany's philosophy. She stopped in to visit Tiffany after her schooling had ended. With the recorder off, the three of us discussed Grace Presbyterian's trunk-or-treat informally. I learned that the teen turned heads at their trunk-or-treat due to her costume: she had paraded around as a bandaged amputee soccer player, complete with bloodied entrails hanging from her shoulders. I noticed her costume during my observation there and recall being quite surprised that such a display had been warranted as acceptable; that is, I was unsure why she obviously had not been told to return home to change. Noticeably close to college-aged, the teen seemed quite knowledgeable—if not proud—about the stir she might have caused among the trunk-or-treat's participants. When the teen left, I turned the recorder back on and resumed the interview with Tiffany, upon which she said:

> I think that before they go off to college is a time that is so great a time to educate them because they're in a safe environment they have the room to really think it over, mull it over, check out everything. I think unfortunately when they go off to college and all of the sudden the protective visor is off and they see it all, and so there's not these protected boundaries for them to process it all and to take it all in and really process it, and so then you have these very extreme changes or very extreme decisions made off of this very sudden realization that there's so much more to the world […] So we try to take that visor off here and really allow them to figure those things out or see those things.

Minister Tara of Bromwich United Methodist church felt that children can get confused by the conflicting cultural signals they receive from both within and without their congregations. They see what the other kids are doing in and around Halloween and figure that they should be doing the same. From across the desk situated between us in her taupe-walled office, she said, "The children are not gonna know you can't be involved in this community event on Halloween night and you're not supposed to wear a costume unless you put up a big sign." By instituting trunk-or-treat, however, Tara believed that her congregation could, at least, issue forth "light" to the public: they could mitigate the dark, brooding atmosphere of Halloween by sending children home to change if their costumes are not appropriate. After hearing of my experience with the girl from Grace Presbyterian's trunk-or-treat, she cringed. "That's just indecency," she proclaimed. "We have little children and they are going to be freaked out."

The preceding paragraphs were juxtaposed to foil ministers Tiffany and Tara's styles of ministry. Sometimes, both styles exist within the same minister. When they do, malaise can ensue. According to independent Bridge of Souls minister, Betsy, Christians experience a lot of pent up tension because of their faith, and look to the holiday to afford them a sense of levity from the expectations they have of themselves. This is especially true at Halloween time, when friends and acquaintances that are not Christian adherents celebrate the holiday heartily while she and her faith community feel they must exercise restrain. Part of this tension, she told me, derives from the fact that Christians are enculturated to look upon Halloween with at least partial disdain:

> If I'm guarded in my conversation about Halloween or about what we do, you know, it's choosing the right words, because if I don't it might cause me to have less conviction or weight on my belief system, like … I don't want to be involved in anything Satanic […] It's a real tug and pull this Halloween thing as to what's right and what's wrong.

Another origin of this tension is because, as disciples of Jesus, Christians like Betsy are sometimes called upon—more like *expected*—to provide financial assistance to cash-strapped individuals who visit their church on a whim. Often she and her church are unable to afford funds for those beyond their

immediate, primarily white and Hispanic faith community and, therefore, must turn the seekers away, which, she admits, runs "contrary to what people think we're supposed to be able to do as Christians." She intimated that some people abuse the generosity of Christians. Consequently, she confessed, "It's always a challenge as a Christian to be able to juggle that cynicism and being truly open to helping people." As Betsy worked at the church's front desk and is the one who must field such impromptu requests, such conundrums, understandably, generate psychological turmoil within her.

Thus, she and others in her middle to upper class faith community look forward to Halloween to blow off some steam and to rejoice in seeing different facets of one another's personalities. For example, those who normally have reserved personalities sometimes shine at their trunk-or-treats; they "go all out" at the event. For Betsy, unlocking each person's "creative and competitive juices" is the secret to Halloween's light; for her, creativity is a God-given, life-affirming force. The Halloween habit of costuming has the propensity to open up an entirely new dimension of the people she interacts with on a spiritual basis. Dressing up and becoming someone else is a release, she says—a chance "to let loose," "to laugh harder," to get out of your insecurities," and "to not view yourself so severely." It's about showing one another who they are in an environment other than Sunday morning, she explained, evoking the adage, *putting on your Sunday best*. She dressed as a hippie for Bridge of Souls' trunk-or-treat and festooned her family's van with psychedelic décor, complete with a bong—a risqué move by any church's standards.

Her fellow minister, Loretta, a colorful dresser who is white and edifyingly loquacious, stated that her "vision" for Bridge of Souls' trunk-or-treat was to "follow Jesus—to *be* the 'Good News' with an emphasis on *being*" and to "actually be the light—to *be* Jesus." As those in her church go out to greet people during their trunk-or-treat, she hoped that visitors will experience the love of God just from being associated with them. This is a notion shared by all of my Christian trunk-or-treat hosts. It is as if being a passionate and devout Christian empowers one to emit some sort of charismatic social gravity—one that automatically attracts others to them. Should this tacit force fail to appeal to visitors, ministers such as Tara from Bromwich United Methodist conveyed that "a seed," at least, will be planted within them, and that visitors will go home with latent aptitudes for prayer and hope:

> I truly believe that once that seed is planted that the Holy Spirit will go in and work on that. I trust that. In His good time. It does not happen immediately. It does not happen overnight. Maybe it does sometimes. That light is that seed. Once the seed is planted and once it starts blossoming and nourishing—that's the light. It's the light of Christ *He* talks about.

By far the most remarkable of my Christian informants' traits are optimism and obsequiousness for serving in Jesus' stead. They reach beyond the confines of their sanctuaries and themselves to practice good deeds and to prod into fruition a better world. It is demonstrative of their faiths that they institute trunk-or-treats; it is through them, as Tara proclaimed allegorically, that they "breathe" God's Word.

4.3 Prologue: 'Be a Light' … As Safe Harbors from Crime

Victor Hugo's character, Monseigneur Bienvenu, in *Les Misérables*, deemed "society … responsible for the night it produces": "this soul is full of darkness and sin is committed but the guilty person is not the man who commits the sin, but he who produces the darkness" (Hugo 1887:19). The author's usage of *night* and *darkness* in this context was emblematic, of course, and meant to signify both the state of ignorance among the downtrodden, as well as the deleterious proclivities of criminals. His Monseigneur would have a society ultimately blame itself for the crimes it endures if that society has neglected to act justly and equally to all.[12] Fiction notwithstanding, according to axiomatic Christian teachings, it is Satan who produces the darkness and society who contracts the sin and commits the crime. The Prince of Darkness, temptation, and crime, then, are seen as easy bedfellows.

Although it has been shown that criminal behavior does not necessarily follow in the path of the active practice of Satanism (Sakheim and Devine 1992), it has been demonstrated that, in some cultural contexts, darkness can, indeed, predispose one to acting unethically, lulling one into such a false sense of anonymity that reserved self-interest gives way to moral misconduct (Zhong *et al*. 2010). This latter finding somewhat speaks to the Christian view that just as there is goodness in the light of the Lord, there lurks danger in the darkness of Satan's shadow. I write this not to advocate any sort of eschatology, but

[12] See John 3:19: "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (N.a.b N.d.a:81).

merely to lend some heuristic credence to crime being glossed metaphorically as *darkness*, and the efforts churches take to assuage it as *light*.

It is the dismissal of this darkness—that is, embattling the presence of crime—that in part fuels churches' impetuses toward hosting trunk-or-treat events. In an ethnography that outlines mainline Protestants' influential roles in public spheres, Ammerman (2002:139) found what drove her Atlantan congregations into providing civic services is the desire "to tend to the most vulnerable of society's members" and an aspiration to "salve some of society's wounds." Trunk-or-treat rituals, which occur in the well-lit parking lots of church buildings and under the watchful eyes of pastors, ministers, and adults, are structured to instill within participants a strong sense of security. Reveling at the foot of the church, trunk-or-treat participants can expect some measure of safety, even if the event is, indeed, couched in some measure of gentility or non-militant religiosity.

Some members of faith communities, as well as some individuals from their surrounding vicinities, choose to trunk-or-treat in order to 'opt out' of the confines and rituals of their neighborhoods, for there at their residences, those inured to Halloween are inundated by unfamiliar faces and the newly acculturated are met with strange customs. Both the faces and the customs wield the potential for threat or imposition. Even the sweetness of candies has been proclaimed as a subterfuge for *maleficarum*: Halloween sadism aside, appeals have been made to Christians to beware of demons and curses that "sneak into" children's trick-or-treat bags during their rounds on Halloween (Daniels 2009:1; People and Events 2009:18). For Christian participants who subscribe to this notion, having the trunk-or-treat on hallowed ground mitigates this danger, as does receiving treats from only those you know from your faith community.

Such perceptions of crime, however extreme, "are important and instructive," Ammerman *et al*. (1997:22) offer, mindful of surveys that reveal that fears of crime are disproportionate to the actual threat crime poses. Social unease is crucial to problematize, especially if one considers that the relational divide between church members and their communities can grow with an increased incidence of regional criminality—real or imagined (Ammerman *et al*. 1997:121). Thus, another mission facing Christian churches

in the suburban South today is strengthening social capital in their diversity-rich atmospheres despite the presence of crime while navigating the multifid disparities of ethics, mores, and worldviews therein, for even the scantest unfamiliarity with one's neighbors feeds into the delinquency—the darkness, the crime—one's community suffers (Beyerlein and Hipp 2005:995).

4.4 'Be a Light' … As Safe Harbors from Crime

When I asked children's minister, Tiffany, "How would you define a trunk-or-treat," she replied:

> For us, it would be an outreach event for the community, designed for the community to come together and a safe place to have a family night—a safe place to enjoy Halloween and not worry about all the other stuff that can come with it. We want it to be enjoyable. We don't want it to be a scary thing.

Besides being mentioned twice in this short snippet of commentary, the word, *safe*, prompted me to motion that Tiffany shed some light on what, exactly, would make Halloween "scary." Although she mentioned candy treats with broken-off needles or razors stuffed inside, sexual predation of adults upon children was at the top of her list. There are, she said, "people—evil people—who are going to do stuff like that […] When we think of safety, it's not so much the candy, but it's just the people that these kids are going to be around." Halloween, she figured—particularly during the "traditional trick-or-treating"—would be the perfect time to prey upon children: "It's dark, and [children] may not be as well-attended." Statistics concerning sexual predation rolled off her tongue readily. "The people that are caught probably just represent one-third of the people that are actually out there," she bemoaned, "and *that's* what's so scary." Black parent, Leonard, summed up parents' trick-or-treating fears thusly: "Black moms are leavin' their neighborhoods with their kids for other [neighborhoods] … —motherfuckers killin' kids—motherfuckin' poison and shit!"

With the recent surge in heinous activity involving children in Atlanta for over a decade—primarily that of human sex trafficking and child prostitution, adult-monitored events like trunk-or-treats seem a logical step in a safe direction for many concerned Atlantans. According to the president of Well-

spring Living, a local program designed to assist sexually abused females, Atlanta—a city whose strip clubs outnumber those in Las Vegas—is "among the top three cities in the US for child prostitution" (Harris 2009:1). Currently, the highest concentration of adolescent females reportedly being paid for sex resides in the north metro area of the city; here, coincidentally, in the counties of Forsyth and Gwinnett, I found trunk-or-treat events to be the most numerous (Staples 2011:1).

Allowing children to wander unsupervised throughout the streets of the city on a dark Halloween night might seem unwise in such an illicit atmosphere. Prior to *Atlanta* magazine's March 2000 article, "Welcome to Sex City—Hope You Brought Cash" (Burns 2000), which highlighted the city's booming nude entertainment and pay-for-sex industry, only five trunk-or-treats had been announced in the greater Atlanta region over a three year span—from 1997 to 1999. Since this article was published, mentions of trunk-or-treat events in area newspapers have averaged eight per year up to and including 2011. Twenty-seven trunk-or-treats were reported in area newspapers and local online sources in 2011—the year of my research—alone. All but one, which took place at a Chik-Fil-A restaurant parking lot in the eastern part of town, were hosted by Christian churches.

The Christian presence in Atlanta has considered the city's burgeoning sex crime a call to arms. The New Baptist Covenant, a grassroots organization stemming from a minute group of "committed Baptist leaders," having cited its home base of Atlanta as having the second-most prominent incidence of human sex trafficking, has embarked upon efforts to promote the crime's cessation (New Baptist Covenant 2012:1). Finding victims at nearby shelters and discovering them on the streets, Covenant members assure them that they can trust them and that "God loves them no matter what they do" (Elliott 2012:1). Similarly, my informants at Ephesus First Baptist have partnered with an organization called Street GRACE, whose mission is to "eradicat[e] the commercial sexual exploitation of children" in Atlanta and elsewhere (Street GRACE 2012:1). As it was expressed to me, through Street GRACE, and as per God's calling, Ephesus can give voice to those who have little say in the world they live in by providing financial resources and counseling to the afflicted.

In 2010, the United Methodist Women initiated a conference in Atlanta in order to commence a "train-the-trainer" program, through which participants commit to share their knowledge about human sex trafficking and child prostitution with their churches and local community (United Methodist Women 2010:1). Both Methodist churches that took part in my study have been involved in this program; it is mandatory for anyone intending to work around their children at their churches' schools and events such as trunk-or-treats. Minister Tara from Bromwich United Methodist further informed me that her church has sent members into the mission fields of Atlanta to "survey the problem."

In addition, over forty-thousand Christians of all denominations gathered outside of Atlanta's Georgia Dome on January 2012 to take part in *Passion 2012*, a 42,000-strong gathering of students from across the globe whose agenda was to raise awareness not only for Georgia's sex crime victims, but for slaves across the world (N.a.d 2012:1). Presbyterian minister, Tiffany, was very pleased with this event:

> I am so excited about the work that *Passion 2012* and Passion City Church is doing with sex trafficking. I think the Christian community has been so blind to this reality of sex trafficking. My church personally has done nothing to make known this problem. I think there is a fear to talk about it openly at church [because] we want to shelter the younger kids from this harsh reality. Grace Presbyterian has only discussed this problem within the college ministry [because] they attended Passion 2012.

Tiffany raised an interesting point: it is the adults in her church—and not the children—that are involved in the dialogue surrounding human sex trafficking and child prostitution. Having elsewhere noted that the children of her faith community come from "privileged" households, mostly white, Tiffany's revelations have demonstrated what environmental geographer, Cindi Katz (2008:9, 10) called the production of "hothouse children," which for her are children who epitomize the accumulation strategies of insecure parents. Children, when cast as such, are psychological investments—"bulwark[s] against ontological insecurity and other anxieties about the future" (Katz 2008:9–10). Children viewed in this light represent yet-unrealized values; they are a sort of living capital around which nervous parents campaign politically, for example, for alternative Halloween-timed rituals through which they can diffuse their anxieties about what they perceive as uncertain times (Katz 2008:10, 15). Sheltering youth from a "harsh re-

ality," indeed, appears the mission of Christian churches like Grace Presbyterian both figuratively and literally. Action toward elimination of such crimes, I believe, is vested in the formation of events such as trunk-or-treats, which have the ability to corral children into safe zones on nights close to Halloween when the (statistically unsubstantiated) threat of child abduction is perceived to be ample.

Trick-or-treating typically requires that children be in close proximity to an adult near a home. Without supervision of the child on Halloween, the logic continues, a predisposed adult could commit a crime against the child. That maligned adult could be a neighbor living next door who's giving out candies. Betsy, white parent and minister at the Bridge of Souls independent church, noted, "Now we don't interact with our neighbors as much […] It's much more scary when you're not neighborly all the time." She said:

> Parents aren't as free to let kids go trick-or-treating or go to the neighbor's house. That might be the first time the kid ever goes to their next-door neighbor's is trick-or-treating. Well, that's kind of scary or … more uncomfortable. It becomes uncomfortable rather than neighborly.

Betsy cited the "condensed nature" of the trunk-or-treat as what promotes neighborliness as well as safety: "What trunk-or-treat does is it kinda makes it the neighborhood, so it becomes the 'new 'hood'. You know, where it's safe. You know people that your kids know 'cause they go to church together, they see each other one or two times a week." Bridge of Souls parent and minister, Loretta, said of her church that "I'm so much more relaxed with my daughter here than I am anywhere—even Chuck E. Cheese's." For them and their church, such familiarity among trunk-or-treating participants breeds trust and fellowship and, hence, safety.

Kendra, children's minister at Nativity United Methodist church, believed formal measures should be taken to shelter trunk-or-treating children. Albeit forthright and friendly to strangers, she performs a background check on anyone that is going to be volunteering to help with their youth or youth events. Kendra grew up just around the corner from her church, and she and her extended family have resided in her booming Atlanta suburb since the early 1800s. Thus, she was expertly warranted to clarify

that some of the extra care that is taken to protect their children during the Halloween season is a residual effect from the Wayne Williams murders that took place in Atlanta in 1979 and 1980:

> It was a safety thing. The kids were just vanishing off the street […] I remember the heightened security and tellin' everybody to check their bags for anything that was not wrapped—lookin' for punctures and all that stuff. People were getting laughs off of endangering the children, 'cos every day you were hearing about an attack or abuse or something like that.

Maynard Jackson, who was the city's mayor at the time, made repeated, persuasive calls to parents to refrain from allowing their children to partake in trick-or-treat in 1980. "It is not in good judgment," he pronounced (Newman 1980:4). The most straightforward of Jackson's admonitions came the day prior to Halloween, when he and the City Council recommended that Atlanta cancel Halloween altogether (Sheppard 1980:A14).

A year later, the same local newspapers that ran these stories began to feature Halloween safety checklists annually, finding, "unfortunately, this generation finds itself in a trying period and it challenges the people to wake up and assert themselves in the general fight against crime and corruption. We must start with intelligent and organized political action which can be decisive" (*Atlanta Daily World* 1982:6). Henceforth, trick-or-treating activities—at least at behest of local newspapers—should gravitate toward daylight hours and feature parental accompaniment. In addition, the press would espouse that civil and corporate groups should increasingly take the Atlantan government's 1980 advice and host "community parties in place of the waning [trick-or-treat] tradition" (Newman 1980:4).[13]

The Halloween season of 2006 saw the onset of increased scrutiny toward those convicted of sex offences, for "state prison officials announced … they would closely monitor registered sex offenders on Halloween night" (Morris *et al*. 2006:3B). Such 'No Candy Laws,' as they are called, were enforced in other states, as well. The reality of the coincidence of sex offences and Halloween was publicly questioned several years later when, in 2010, on the day before Halloween, the Atlanta Journal-Constitution

[13] At present, however, trick-or-treating is on the rise; 32.9 percent said they will take their children trick-or-treating in 2011, compared with 31.7 percent in 2010 (BIGresearch 2011:1).

featured an article on the flip side of its first page relating the incidence of child abuse and Halloween. "Strangers with candy—," it read, "the convicted sex offender kind—are statistically no more likely to tempt children on Halloween than on other days of the year" (Simmons 2010:1B; see Chaffin *et al*. 2009). Despite this, Georgia's Department of Corrections advised paroled or probationary sex offenders—under threat of arrest—to not decorate for the holiday, to turn off their outside lights, and to not answer their doors (Simmons 2010:1B). The office's "Operation Safe Halloween" was in full swing that year; it dispatched officers randomly to 140 thousand offenders' homes to ensure compliance (Morris *et al.* 2006:3B). The Department held its fourth annual "Operation Safe Halloween" in 2011 (Connell 2011:1).

Such is part of the historical presage that influences current practices at the churches whose trunk-or-treats I studied and that would affect my interactions with them. Prior to meeting with Bromwich United Methodist Church's children's minister, Dana, in-person for the first time, I had already agreed to volunteer for her church's trunk-or-treat over email. She, white and in her mid- to late twenties, set our initial meeting in a public place—at a nearby Starbuck's coffee shop close to her church. We got along famously from the start, sharing personal information and small talk before we segued into the meat of our interview. The next fifteen minutes of our time together was spent watching me fill out affidavits indicating that I never wounded or molested a child. This process was one of assurance, she said—necessary so "we can be above reproach: no one can ever say that we have ever hurt a child." My Social Security Number was fair game; it was a required element necessary for her to check my criminal record; its collection is a policy already in place at her church, not only for trunk-or-treat volunteers, but also for anyone working with the children there.

This process occurred three times during my Halloween season in 2011. Bromwich United Methodist, Wood Chapel United Methodist, and Ephesus First Baptist all required that I furnish detailed and official records of who I was. Grace Presbyterian did not, for I was only a guest at their trunk-or-treat. However, my presence as a lone male looking on at the event, I imagine, raised suspicion. I wondered whether all of the vehicles registered and volunteers admitted to participate in the trunk-or-treats actually had background checks performed on them; of each, there were hundreds. My suspicion that they had not

was confirmed when Ephesus' children's minister, Kelly, told me at our second meeting that only a few people are actually run through criminal database systems and that the rest are kept as a precaution in case something happens at their trunk-or-treat; then, they would all be run in retrospect in order to zero in on a possible offender.

Kelly, a locally raised twenty something woman gifted with a composure of slight intensity, continuously checks the Georgia Sex Offender Database as people register or volunteer for her trunk-or-treat, and has "taken some extra measures to make sure that people are safe, but especially children." These include having automated check-in and check-out points at the event. The IDs associated with children and parents that are checked-in must match at check-out, she explained, "so you don't walk off with somebody's kid." Most of my nine informants mentioned relying on such a system during their trunk-or-treats, but only two out of the four churches I visited—Ephesus First Baptist and Wood Chapel United Methodist—actually seemed to use it. Enforcement of this policy was apparently difficult; parents would usually just walk past the check-out isle when they and their children were ready to leave. However, Wood Chapel United Methodist's application of this policy was particularly stringent: I, for example, needed to be guided in and out of the gated parking lot by its watchful attendees in the following manner.

I entered the driveway to get to Wood Chapel United Methodist's parking lot where the church's *Trunk-or-Treat* event was to be held. Prior to even reaching the lot in the back of the church, while my car was rolling forward, a woman in plain clothes flagged me down to a stop to collect the piece of paper that was my entrance to the event. It was my registration ticket to volunteer for the event. I had printed it after receiving confirmation from the church that my name, address, and email, as well as my driver's license number (which I had provided to them weeks prior online) all checked out. These personal bits of information had likely all been resolved against the statewide criminal and sexual offender's databases.

After checking-in with this first attendant, I was waved onward toward a spacious one-acre plain of asphalt already thick with cars by four men holding two glowing orange light sticks each. They wore reflective yellow jumpsuits with white stripes on either side of their body going from head-to-toe. One might mistake them for firemen if glancing from afar, particularly if having surmised that civic law-

enforcement offices are increasingly teaming up with communities and corporate entities to combat crime via programs such as neighborhood watch and other public interest campaigns (Stewart 1985:759). A line of three more dressed the same way—two men and a woman—guided me to my space. I needed to park forward into it, hood-first, so that the trunk of my hatched sports utility vehicle could face toward the incipient procession of children.

The parking lot was awash with Spidermen and sorcerers. A cadre of antsy children was lining up not far away. I had only a brief amount of time to set up my car for trunk-or-treaters, as I had a Wiccan Samhain celebration to attend barely an hour later. Setting up one's vehicle for the event typically entails decorating the back of it. Recalling from reading the church's website weeks ago that I was to "ensure decorations and costumes are appropriate for this church event (no blood, gore or evil please)" and that scary decorations would be frowned upon by church staff and trunk-or-treating parents, alike, I decided to festoon my car with discorporealized glowing eyes, two skulls, a few hanging skeletons, and an automated spider that dropped down a vertical string upon detecting the slightest sound. I positioned the latter over a large bowl of candy that it might descend its web when the children approached.

I look back on my décor with a small sense of regret, for one person's skull is another person's gore. "Some people," as minister Tara from Bromwich United Methodist quipped, "are missing the 'appropriate chip'." I hope I was not one of those people. Nowhere on the websites advertising trunk-or-treats and hosting the registration fields were guidelines on what is and what is not appropriate. A list of banned symbols and images might have been quite helpful, I imagine, as most people would not wish to offend anyone. Harm to children, I suppose, can be accomplished without touching them. Although nobody said a word to me, I internalized their censorship concerning such imagery.

Dana and Tara from Bromwich United Methodist follow other measures to ensure the safety of those who participate in their trunk-or-treats. According to Dana, these include sanctioning only individually wrapped, commercially manufactured candies so "there's no chance of salmonella," having the event during the daylight hours between 4:00 PM and 5:00 PM so that it's "well-lit," and cordoning off the parking lot where the trunk-or-treating cars park "so there's no chance [of children] getting hit by cars."

One of the members of her church who will be present at her church's trunk-or-treat is a US marshal and she knows that's he's "packing"; that is, the marshal carries a gun at all times. In addition, Dana hires uniformed police officers for her events "so that they can be a presence." I remember only one at the trunk-or-treat in 2011. Curiously, she made it quite clear to me that the end time established for her events are strictly adhered to as "a safety signal to say that you're on your own as far as supervision." I was surprised how quickly one could dismiss such a hefty responsibility—the caring for of children—with but one tick of a clock hand, but I can attest that Bromwich's church grounds were vacated promptly at the end of the event: the staff and I were sitting in a nearby Zaxby's sharing dinner within half an hour of the event's end.

Since, Dana has returned to seminary. Her successor, Tara, a forty-five-year-old parent, reminisced about the trick-or-treat-timed paranoia from her childhood: "My mom would always be checking everything—making sure there wasn't a razor blade in the caramel or dosed it with some LSD—like she would know!" She laughed at the end of this statement, but still harbored concerns about trick-or-treating activities at Halloween time. For her, Bromwich's trunk-or-treat dispels any worry surrounding trick-or-treating—particularly the traffic: "What it offers is a safe place to take your children to get the candy without being worried about getting run-over. I worry more about the drivers when my kids are trick-or-treating. We generally have it when it's daylight—in the mid-afternoon."

Watery Run Baptist children's minister, Iris' concern about trunk-or-treat had been "about keeping it safe," as well: "We have a huge parking lot and we found we could control traffic in the back part of it." "That," she said, "is mostly important for keeping kids safe." However, she, too, mentioned the threat of poisoned candies:

> Parents are cautious about checking the candy. Even when I was a kid, your parents always checked the candy to see if they could tell if it was safe or it had been tampered with or opened—that kind of thing. And so I think there's a greater degree of trust here at the church and we have lots—all of the communities [and] even the senior adult communities—contribute candy to this event […] You can't assume that it's going to be safe because it's from a church setting, as we all know, but I think there's a greater degree of trust with that.

Minister Dana, curiously, also touched upon the trust afforded to churches in their preparations of foodstuffs. She supposed that the caramel apples she had hoped to serve at Bromwich's trunk-or-treat would be granted an automatic approval from trunk-or-treating participants: "If we do decide to hang some apples that were dipped in caramel [it] will be done in a highly sanitized kitchen which we have on premises and then brought over directly." I asked her whether it was because the homemade apples come from the church that they are permissed. She replied, "Yes—lots of times it's 'Oh, it's from the church, so we know it's gotta be safe.'"

Very rarely, however, congregants are dissuaded from partaking in church-prepared foods. Dana recounted a story for me about a set of parents "that would not let their kids dye Easter eggs on our property because they worried about what was in the dye—that if somebody had tampered with it or whatever because it was done on [church] property." Her implicit reaction to this was "Wow. It's sad to be that scared of things." Her church's trunk-or-treat was the only one of the four I attended in 2011 that did not serve food, despite her statement early in our interview, "When we serve food, they always come."[14]

Nativity United Methodist's children's minister, Kendra, remarked how her church's pastor keeps a rooster-shaped box of candy in his office for congregant children who visit him. "It builds up relationships […] and welcomes them," she said. "We keep his box full of candy," she followed; most of it is leftover treats from their trunk-or-treats—sweets that were donated by congregants and others in the community. Nativity church, itself, bought "mounds and mounds" of candy in 2011 "just in case people don't have enough."

Much of what trunk-or-treat is about is gifting. Although candy is indubitably part of the ritual, the treat the hosts are offering to the community is safety; churches aim to secure both the sacred and the secular. The event is invoked as a safe harbor from crime, traffic, and poisoned candies.

[14] Food, she had said, particularly resonates with Bromwich United Methodist's African-American and black congregants' cultures. Families in her community, I was told, gather around it: "It's built into our culture in the South."

4.5 Prologue: 'Convene with the Culture'

Holidays, if viewed in Mach's (1993:105) sense of "national state rituals," may alienate some groups if they do not readily subscribe to the ideologies that frame them or the values they represent, for with every holiday comes a barrage of symbolism through which power is subtly asserted (Kopytoff 1986:73). In the case of Halloween, which neither serves any nationalistic agendas nor commemorates any ethnic establishments, this power is instated by the populace, rather than by the government—it is "deinstitutionalized" (Rogers 1996:463, 468, 474). The simple fact that, nationally, around seventy-percent of Americans of all sorts celebrate Halloween in one shape or form means that the holiday's attendant symbolism—its witches, its ghosts, its goblins—is everywhere (BIGresearch 2011:1). However, efforts are consistently taken by many Christians to purge the holiday of its dark symbolism and "things that are evil," and replace them with things of a lighter, "more spiritual focus" (Harris 1998:B03; Rogers 2002:161).

Fundamentalist Christian literature frequently emphasizes Halloween's "netherworld resonances" (Rogers 2002:12): the holiday has been called "devil's night" (Ferrell 2003:64) and an "occult celebration" (Boehm 2006:103); its rituals have been cast as "tom-foolery and dull vulgarity" (Hellriegel 1956:378), as well as "malicious acts 'for fun'" (Zyromski 2012:1); its associated symbolism has been claimed to be that "of Satan" and "contrary to God's word" (N.a.c N.d.b:1). However, these viewpoints are extremely conservative and not shared by all Christians. According to a survey conducted by Christian Forums website, almost half of the Christians across the nation celebrate Halloween in one form or another (Christian Forums 2010:1; see Gallup Poll 2006). The increasing willingness on Christian churches' part to accede to the predilections of the populace—that is, their unique adaption of popular Halloween rituals and symbolism—should be seen less as a surrender of biblical principles than an effort to ameliorate their reputations for austerity and to attract newcomers.

Congregations, as James Hopewell (1987:5) once put it, "cannot regularly gather for what they feel to be religious purposes without developing a complex network of signals and symbols and conventions." The chalice, the scripture, and the bodily experience summoned through ritual and excitations of

the Word—these are the stuffs that meld a community of faith. Members are apt to draw from the same semantic web when carrying out their institutional logic, as if reading from the same page. Their interstitial bonding is concomitant with their conjoined reading of the cultural texts of recitation and ritual, iconography and materials, that they themselves have adapted, inducted, or produce. As Ammerman *et al*. (1997:55) wrote,

> In a powerful sense, worship is an event that is meant to express the unifying vision of the congregation. All rituals help to create the community that enacts them […] ritual forms of communication can create meaning-spaces that give shape to individual and group life.

Prior to ritualistic performances, congregants tend to somewhat agree on what materials and images can be present, and what symbols and meanings from which they can draw. Using these "symbolic inventories" (Kopytoff 1986:73), they then direct their combined energies to the ends they deem necessary. If there is any deviance from what they had set out to accomplish during or after the ritual, it can potentially cause discord among the ritual's participants. Subsequently, the culpability for an errant ritual can rest with the symbols chosen just as much as with participants involved.

Particularly in the case of trunk-or-treat rituals, as they are public events, and since disparate "notions of the common good" are incorporated, expressed, and negotiated amid the figurative darkness of a controversial holiday among some Christians, visual, linguistic, and material symbols—cultural communiqués—must be chosen with care by the hosting churches, at least to the extent with which to approach mutual accord among participants (Ammerman 2002:154). Individual sensibilities must not be offended, particularly if a congregation hopes to attract trunk-or-treat participants again for worship or other church events. Thus, although congregations' practices are "shaped by the larger divisions of the larger cultural world" (Ammerman *et al*. 1997:56), bats, spiders, witches, skeletons, ghosts, devils and demons—the ubiquitous trappings of Halloween pop culture—still tend to be discouraged at many of these events.

Conversely, however, some churches hosting trunk-or-treats take care to not come across as too ascetic. According to several of my informants, abstemious behavior makes them appear suspect to the

more secularized visitors. Therefore, some churches incorporate or creatively adapt extant Halloween ritual and symbolism to blend with the festivities occurring elsewhere, beyond the more sacralized environment. In such instances, one might see a minister parading around in a Harry Potter wizard costume, a booth for making edible spiders, or a makeshift haunted house populated by actors and optical illusions reminiscent of ghosts and zombies.

In either case, the congregational hosts of trunk-or-treat events are cognizant that visitors can identify who is, and who is not, "'like them'," and that they can detect whether the material, sensual, and temporal aspects of the congregation's trunk-or-treat ritual are representative of the manners by which the church reaches out to God in other contexts (Ammerman *et al*. 1997:56). Icons, images, and material objects have the ability to minister; they also have the capacity to communicate something about those who use them: "the product becomes a sermon; the words of the preacher are replaced by the exchange of the visual object" (McDannell 1995:266–267). Thus, trunk-or-treating churches manipulate the quality of their visual and material culture to suit their purposes for the event. Incorporating modernity is an important factor in churches choosing to stay afloat, particularly in this time of economic uncertainty. New members are always needed, so churches often straddle the line between conservatism and more liberal self-representations since competition for congregants is so great.

4.6 'Convene with the Culture'

Near October 2011's end, the weather in Atlanta was agreeable. I had signed up to assist at Ephesus First Baptist Church's *Not So Scary Fall Festival and Trunk-or-Treat* on a Wednesday evening, a usual gathering night for Baptists. The City of Decatur, where the festival took place, has been around since before shovels broke ground to form the greater city of Atlanta. In the early to mid-1800s, the land close to where the city now stands had been known as Terminus—the final stop of the Western and Atlantic railroad. Decatur is well-known locally for its walker- and biker-friendly thoroughfares and intersections. As its website proclaims, it was named "the most walkable city in Georgia" in 2011 (City of Decatur 2012:1).

Ephesus First Baptist is a popular destination for 'Decaturites,' as those who live in the city locally are called. Several times a year, congregants and non-congregants, alike, rush to the church to attend the bake sales and yard sales that spread across its gaping two-acre lawn. As populous as these events become, passersby might mistake the church's turf for Decatur's fairgrounds. However, spying the tall and stately columned sanctuary just beyond the lawn would likely dispel such imaginings.

The name of the event for which I volunteered at Ephesus—the *Not So Scary Fall Festival and Trunk-or-Treat*—eponymously intimates that the fright-inducing iconography typical of Halloween had been all but stripped from the event. Planners Kelly and Elaine, children's ministers at the church, worked hard at making sure that there would be "nothing unsightly to children"—frightening decorations, dissonant music, or food that was "not fun." Hot dogs and spider cookies were to be the chosen fare, and *The Monster Mash* would be the most daring music for dining.[15]

Such tactics were to be the norm for most of the trunk-or-treats for which I volunteered, and even for those trunk-or-treats whose planners I interviewed at length. Not a father myself, I find it interesting that parents seem desirous to shelter their children from things they will encounter later in life, such as [artificial] blood smears and [masked] horned effigies, since the whole reason for bringing up children is to prepare them for what they might encounter in their futures. Admittedly, this perspective comes from an ethnographer whose favorite movies are in the horror genre, and I understand the logic as presented to me by several of the trunk-or-treat planners: the brains of young children have not all the tools they need to decipher whether something is real or simulated, so whatever is presented to them is taken as reality and thus, perhaps, as a threat.

Discussion with kids about what is real and what is not is done at the churches' schools; conversations with them about the "serious scary" stuff is usually reserved for when children get to their teens. As Minister Dana from Bromwich Methodist Church explained to me when I asked about the representation of ghosts at their Halloween event, if it doesn't come from the Body of Christ, it is not real:

[15] The most notable costumes at Ephesus First Baptist's trunk-or-treat were numerous girl faeries and one Dr. Who. It seemed as if children here adhered to some implicit and conservative dress code. No 'scary' costumes were seen.

> We do believe in a ghost—not so much like Casper. This is sort of the conversation we have with kids and sort of the unofficial policy at our pre-school: […] we can talk about mummies, we can talk about spiders; bats exist. If we want to bring those up at Halloween, that's fine. We can even represent what other cultures have done through the ages. Obviously, if it's not age-appropriate—we're not gonna talk about human sacrifice in the Amazon or whatever with pre-school children—but as far as that kind of thing goes, we try to stay away from witches and creatures that don't exist that are overly violent like vampires, werewolves not so much, zombies—nah—because it tends to be violent and it scares little kids. If I were hanging out with teenagers alone and they wanted to talk about it—solicit a conversation with me—we can talk about it.

This attention to thematic programming is part of what I summed up earlier in this work as 'being a light'. Parents and guardians, I was told, won't bring children to an event if it features that thematically "dark mood" that typically accompanies Halloween celebrations: "It makes our kids uncomfortable," said forty-year-old parent, Mark, from Ephesus First Baptist. Besides being counter-intuitive to some of the churches' main imperative—to gain new members, to feature scary schlock would apparently be destructive to children's' blossoming psyches. This protectiveness reflects what Katz called *hyper-vigilance*—the "great and growing anxiety that children can and should be protected from everything" (2001:48). To be hyper-vigilant in the case of trunk-or-treats means to dispense with scary decorations, nearly as much as it does to hire security guards, to have undercover police, and to feature check-in and check-out points at the sites of ingress and egress all at the same time, as several of my informants' trunk-or-treats did.

Fear and anxiety suffuse these post-September 11 United States: public surveillance cameras and gated communities pervade the spaces most encounter everyday (Blake 1999:1D). They are the products of a heightened state of awareness whose cost is levied upon the youth of the present generation and whose continuance shall likely haunt those of beyond (see Acland 1994). True crime levels are at an all-time low, and but for the abstractions of paranoia-laden newscasts and such—to wit Baudrillard might entrust the label, 'liquidated referentials'—all in Atlanta, Georgia is peachier than ever before (Federal Bureau of Investigation 2011a:1; Federal Bureau of Investigation 2011b:1; see Baudrillard 2006[1981]).

Later I attended another trunk-or-treat. It was a Saturday event put on by Grace Presbyterian church, twenty-one miles from the heart of Atlanta. I was just a guest at this trunk-or-treat, intent on taking in the event from afar, without being straddled with working with the church members at setting up and tending to the event or being a car positioned to hand out candy. I was free to roam the event as I pleased.

A far cry from the iconographic conservatism at Ephesus, the Grace Presbyterian event featured a haunted house attraction entitled the *Maze of Mystery*. 'Geared for fear', it was put together by the church's own thespian ensemble, The Shining Light Theatre, in a trailer behind the church. Signage touted the optical illusions within. Inside, blacklights and red glowing Christmas strings illuminated the trailer and reflected off of the black trash bags hung to minimize the invading daylight that seeped through the constantly opened doors. Fortune-tellers cradled tesla lamps in their hands; bloodied zombie actors, young and middle-aged, lumbered and lunged at spectators.

The most notable section of the *Maze* was the candle-lit buffet table with three chefs standing behind it. Before them, on the table, were three serving platters with lids. With each volley of viewers, the chefs would yank off the lids of the plates to reveal the heads of three children stuffed up through holes cut in the table-top.

Such willingness to indulge in some of the scarier parts of Halloween culture, I believe, reflected Grace Presbyterian's children's minister, Tiffany's, philosophy toward 'things that go "bump" in the night': "I think ghosts bring out questions about thinking about an afterlife—but that's healthy." She had wanted the *Maze* to remain "fun," yet not a place "where we dwell on demons … or Satan," since she believes that was never the original intent of Halloween. Tiffany, who has an undergraduate degree in psychology, spoke to me further about Grace Presbyterian's two-month-long preparation process for the *Maze of Mystery*:

> When we first laid plans for the *Maze of Mystery*, there was all this talk about zombies and some gross stuff. It was not that we think that's demonic or we think that's bad. The concern was we don't want to be scaring kids and so we just wanna make sure that the kids are going to come

> here and have fun and be entertained by it. I'm sure some of the littler kids were kinda spooked out by the *Maze of Mystery* stuff even though all of it was just illusions and stuff, but we never want kids to be scared of this place. […] I think it's silly to go and get scared out of your mind. Other people feel differently about that. We need to relook that to consider how scary we should be. You know—who's our target audience.

The target audience was children, and they were apparently thrilled with the spectacle they faced inside the *Maze*. While I waited in line, scores of them would brush by me to get to the front—effectively butting ahead in front of everyone. Adults were waiting in line, too, but none, including myself, were visibly upset by this. Even though many of these intervening children had just come out of the *Maze*, they could not wait to get back in! Tiffany related that kids loved it because "they think Halloween can get such a negative name to it." Grace Presbyterian's mission—"to be a light and to serve [the] community"—was partially accomplished by the theatre troupe's feat, and quite reflective of its name.

The other two trunk-or-treats I attended—Bromwich United Methodist's and Wood Chapel United Methodist's—relied on their participants to provide the sensual ambiance of their trunk-or-treat. The hosts played no music, nor did they outwardly promote any visual schema, save Wood Chapel's caveat, "no blood, gore or evil please." Wood Chapel's white Youth Director, Judy, made it clear to me that her church purposely never refers to their trunk-or-treat as a 'Halloween event,' but as one that is initiated to simply commemorate the fall season. As her trunk-or-treat was the most diverse in which I participated—from American white to American black, from first-generation African to second-generation Pakistani, perhaps no cultural sensibilities were wont to be cast aside.

Bromwich's trunk-or-treat featured a colorful ensemble of games in their auditorium during the event. Their parking lot outside remained austere and undecorated, save the handful of ornamented cars (perhaps twelve of them) that participated in the trunk-or-treating procession. Signage announcing "Witch Way" greeted entrants as they approached the lot where the event was held. There, two women dressed as witches handed out candy; the children's minister, Dana, herself, was a princess this year, although in years past she has been known to dress as wizardly characters from one of her favorite series of novels, Harry Potter.

I asked her how others around her at the church speak of Halloween. "The older generation," she told me, "is concerned about any representation of evil forces, which they think would be wrapped up in undead and creatures like that and monsters. They want everything based in reality." She let me know that a substantial portion of her congregation was over fifty and upper-middle class; this reflected whom I saw standing by their vehicles at her church's trunk-or-treat. "However," she continued, "if you're forty and under Halloween is basically a night of fun. You get to delve in your geeky side … and nobody will make fun of it […] You're given a good excuse to celebrate." Dana then mused philosophically on fear:

> Of course that's what we want to teach—reality versus imagined. Although more than people want to admit, in the spiritual realm there are things to be afraid of. So that's a conversation we always have at Halloween time is that fear is useful as long as it does not overtake who you are […] It's kinda fun to be scared.

She topped off this exchange with "where you find your truth and your safety is with Jesus." She walked around frantically at the event, keeping a watchful eye on how things were coming along. By the time the last trunk-or-treating car deconstructed its tailgate décor and departed for home at 5:22 PM, she was dripping with sweat. Between the bulk of her costume and her constant corralling of children, she was exhausted by the end of the event. She and the other congregant helpers all had taken great pains to meet and greet everyone that came.

Interestingly, another theme that came up in most of my interviews is reflected in Ephesus First Baptist Children's Minister, Kelly's comment: "It is a good way for us just to interact with people in our community and show them that we're not scary." Apparently, as several informants have expressed, being a Christian alienates them from many in their environs. Ephesus Baptist's minister, Kelly, shared shyly that she feels that most people think Christians sit around and talk about Jesus all the time—a fact, she believed, that is "rather off-putting" to non-Christians. For her—particularly as her church is a *First* Baptist church and not simply a Baptist church—there is a "stigma" that goes along with being a member: members of First Baptist churches, she said, tend to be well-educated, upper-middle class, and white. "A lot of times," she relayed to me, "I feel like the 'First Baptist' church in a community is perceived as the

‘stuffy one’ with the people who are, like, ‘rich’, or ‘the church has probably been there a long time’, so ‘there’s a certain *kind* of people that go to First Baptist churches.’”

“I’ve heard people refer to us as uppity or self-righteous,” added Nativity United Methodist Minister, Kendra, to which she countered with a popular saying she has often heard proffered among Christians: “Christians don’t claim to be perfect; they’re just trying to do better.” People, she has found, are “hesitant” to simply approach her church’s buildings or personnel when they have inquiries about Nativity and what services and masses the church offers. Thus, in addition to their trunk-or-treat event, they added a fourth service that meets on Saturday evenings called *Revive!* in order to attract curious newcomers who wish to “test” her church. Here, they serve refreshments and field attendee questions concerning the Scripture—all in a dimly lit, pillowed environment of their gymnasium.

Minister Dana, too, by way of Bromwich United Methodist’s trunk-or-treats, hopes to “present people who love Jesus as being easily accessible.” Her recent replacement, Tara, mused on the importance of exercising tolerance in order to receive acceptance. “Suppose you’re really conservative,” she said, “it’s almost viewed as not being accepting of anything outside of the small, narrow-minded view of things, and that you’re perceived of as being from the past.” If churches don’t adapt to change in their cultures and closer to home, she summed, they’re going to be “left behind.” She and her church, as if in response to the burgeoning African-American and black population in their county, wants everyone that visits their church to believe themselves welcomed and to not think that Bromwich is, as she said, “just a white church.” Despite over sixty-percent of their church being made up of African-Americans, blacks, and “mixed families,” both she and Dana feel their welcoming message is sometimes lost.

Tiffany spoke of how her church, Grace Presbyterian, had to change its culture inside out to attract the community. They began hosting events such as *Movies on the Lawn*, the *Easter Egg Hunt*, and of course, *Trunk-or-Treat*. She, too, believed that people are sometimes intimidated to approach a Christian church: “There’s a hesitancy to walk through the doors of a church ‘cos you don’t know what’s going to happen inside, but if we have these *outside* events … those are much more appealing.” They are alluring to, she said, the various ethnic groups that have settled around who are looking for a church of their own.

Of all of the trunk-or-treats I attended, Grace Presbyterian ventured farthest in terms of the outlandish spectacle typically reserved for non-Christian celebrants on Halloween. The spooky displays featured throughout their *Maze of Mystery* haunted house rivaled that found at secular attractions and, perhaps, reflected Tiffany's desire to simulate normative Halloween culture. As she explained, "We, as a church are not called to be on our own. We are called to be in the culture, and Halloween is part of the culture." Jesus, she opined, would want them to be out "being a part of everything." He was always venturing outside of the synagogue, she said, "doing His ministry in the middle of the culture." That, she concluded, is what drew people to Him.

Trunk-or-treats enable these and other Christians to bridge ideological gaps they envision that exist between them and many in their societies, be they breaches indicative of religious, socioeconomic, ethnic—even aesthetic—circumstances. Through these events, which are becoming more prevalent in Atlanta and its vicinity, churches offer sensual representations concordant with their beliefs and, at the same time, announce themselves as members of an active public. The purposeful religiosity vested in these events, which, on any other date, might otherwise be off-putting to non-Christians, is eclipsed by the spectacle they produce. Through trunk-or-treats, churches can *re*-represent their identities to others in their communities using themes and symbolism from which they once shied away in order to entice non-congregants onto their grounds. They convene with the culture. Paired with the surge of lay Halloween observers in their urban environs seeking respite from the dangers and inconveniences perceived to accompany the holiday, bountiful are the opportunities for such bridging.

Ostensible exemplars of this bridging of cultures can be recognized across time. One might recall how the early Church had enculturated pagans by adopting their holidays and dedicating their gathering trees to the Church, despite the fact that these individuals were viewed by Christian potentiates as marginal and heathenish. The threat that pagans presented to the Church was thereby diverted into syncretic practices, such as All Saints' Day (pagan Samhain) and Christmas (pagan Yule), and the Christian faith grew. In a similar vein—however, in a more genteel manner—John Wycliffe and others, like the ancient Jews before them, had recognized the need to translate the venerated scriptures into the vulgar languages

of target local populations in order to permit access to those teachings and facilitate their spread. It might seem curiously serendipitous, then—seeing as how Halloween is popularly associated with that which lies outside the Christian realm, that which can approach heathenish proportions, that which is dangerously pagan, that trunk-or-treats would have come about. Just as most missionaries recognize the importance of acknowledging the plurality of cultures and are careful not to force upon potential acolytes the specificities of their own when delivering the Gospel, churches, through trunk-or-treats, can absorb, and then project, customary symbolic systems; they can tailor them to their Christian message, yet, all the while, couch them in the cultures of their recipients.

In order to further perceive such syncretism at work in the context of my study, I ask the reader to consider, for a moment, the public–private distinction as immaterial; consider it vanquished by what Gal (2002) asserts to be continual renegotiations that take place between the two: a house is a private place, but within that house is a living room—a rather public space. Proceed along this logic while considering the bedroom of that house (private) or a person's purse (private) lying within the living room (public) and one will lapse into a continuum of public–private distinctions that take on a fractal quality; that is, the public–private distinctions will repeatedly produce others within themselves and result in "multiple nestings," like within like (Gal 2002:81).

Further consider that many believe religions and faiths should remain private inclinations—personal leanings not to be hoisted upon others blatantly or in public. Hence, some evangelicals have found the need to circumvent the public–private distinction in order to engage a resistant, preach-proof public. In Britain, for example, Engelke's (2012:157) Bible Society employed what he describes as ambient religiosity—"sensual registers that often serve to confuse the coherence of public–private divides"—in order to do so. The Bible Society, wishing to communicate the arrival of Christmas in a Christian way, yet recognizing the consumerism that has engulfed the holiday, concocted a way to reach the "Harry Potter public on a conceptual middle ground" (Engelke 2012:157): they hung manga-like angel-shaped kites that were only faintly reminiscent of the cherubesque legions ubiquitously associated with Christmas decorations and the Christian faith in the background of a public mall. The idea worked: the unobtrusive ma-

teriality and understated religiosity of the display resonated with observers, and communicated, but did not overextend, the Bible Society's Christian message.

Just as these "angels of Swindon" wooed non-Christians via their ambient religiosity, trunk-or-treats' pious brand of Halloween zeal announces itself softly (Engelke 2012). Set back on private land and expressed in subtly reverent inclusions and exclusions—ritual, décor, music, and what not—these events merge inconspicuously with the fervent background commercialization that has consumed Halloween yet retain their Christian message, and, thus, can potentially enculturate otherwise resistant attendees and public passersby. At first glance syncretic adaptations of Christian and Neopagan traditions, Halloween trunk-or-treats might more be considered a hybrid crossover of the cultures of marketplace economy and Christianity.

4.7 Prologue: 'Become …'

One of the primary challenges churches face in the twenty-first century is how to maintain the bulk of their congregations despite upsurges in America's religious diversity. This diversity, of course, is not merely a matter of Christian as contrasted with non-Christian—that is, contrasted with Buddhist, Muslim, or other adherent, but that of the infra-denominational fragmentation that has marked Christianity, itself, for over a millennium (Wuthnow 2005; Smith 2002). This *denominationalism*, as it is called, is the continual division of one unified Christian church into many churches and sects, such as First Baptist or Southern Baptist, for example, or Lutheran or Methodist (Niebuhr 1929). The partitioning that occurs within Christian denominations means that there are less Christians available to populate any one church or faith community.

Of the over one million immigrants who have obtained legal permanent resident status in the United States in 2010, almost 25 thousand have done so in the state of Georgia (United States Department of Homeland Security 2011:5, 16). In just that year, over 20 thousand have settled in the northern Atlanta metro area—Atlanta, Sandy Springs, and Marietta (United States Department of Homeland Security 2011:17). Many of these arrivals are from countries where Christians are a minority; in all likelihood, it

follows, these new arrivals are not Christians (Wuthnow 2005:2). This thereby limits the potential number of available bodies for Christian congregations.

In addition, more and more Christians deem themselves non-denominational; sixteen percent of adult Americans are reluctant to tie their identities to any one creed or faith (Pew Research Center 2009:8; see Kosmin and Keysar 2009; see Cimino and Lattin 1998). For example, there has been an increase in those who have chosen to follow what is known as the *emerging church movement*. The emerging church movement has been cast as an informal "conversation" with what is considered by denominational Christians to be otherwise immutable Christian dogma (McKnight 2007:34–35). Followers, then, are much less denominational adherents than freelance 'conversationalists'—free to pick and choose from the broad aspects of Christianity's teachings and to decide how to integrate them with their own unique outlooks and self-driven personal lives (Wuthnow 2005:101). From my experience here in Atlanta, although conversationalists consider themselves non-denominational, some still choose to formally assemble and meet in a physical building as a faith community.

Ultimately, some adult Americans have chosen to abandon Christianity altogether. Of those who have, forty-percent still retain spiritual beliefs (Pew Research Center 2009:8). "Religion," this portion expressed, "is at least somewhat important in their lives" (Pew Research Center 2009:8). It was unreported whether these individuals became atheists or were caught up in one of the "viral" new age movements that have emerged since the sixties and seventies and joined one of the faiths growing fastest, such as Wicca or Hindu (Bannatyne 2011:62; Kimball 2008:1; Smith 2002). According to the American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS), 15 percent of American adults in 2008 reported "None" as their religion (Kosmin *et al*. 2009:i). There are, simply, less Christians to go around.

Compounding these articulations, and according to the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life's *Faith in Flux* survey, at least half of Americans have changed their faiths at least once over their lifetimes (Pew Research Center 2009:1, 3; Grossman 2009:1). Luis Lugo, director of the Pew Research Center's survey, stated that this growing phenomenon, known as church-shopping, reflects the highly dynamic and competitive "religious marketplace" of the U.S. (*Time, Inc.* 2009:1; see Cimino and Lattin 1998). Alt-

hough one might imagine that church indignities, such as those involving the Catholic sexual abuse scandal, or an increase in scientism are the major reasons why people become unaffiliated with an organized faith in one way or another, this is not the case. A near-majority of church-shoppers claim that they simply "drifted away from the religion" or that their "spiritual needs were not being met" (Pew Research Center 2009:6).

What all of this boils down to is that "'mainline' churches have undergone a steady decline in membership for several decades […] and many will close" (Clayton 2009:1). The longevity of a church is, for the most part, determined by the number of people in its congregation. As Ammerman *et al*. (1997:48) note:

> The vast majority of congregations support themselves from current contributions from their members. Paying their bills depends on how many members there are, and how much money the members have, and how much of it they are willing to give to the church.

Trunk-or-treat events are, thus, instrumental acts. They are a way for churches to bolster their number in their congregation. I had supposed that, in rare cases, trunk-or-treats might also be direct recompensatory methods that boost the funds available for congregants' spiritual recreation. However, I was told that, more often than not, they only indirectly do so, for tithes subsequently increase with each added member.

4.8 'Become …'

There are other ways of being a light; that is, there are more ways to be a beacon to the outlying geographical community other than extending Jesus' ministry and providing safe harbors from crime. One of them involves what the churches I interacted with summed as "outreach." Outreach consists of the construction and issuance of a unique message from one group to another—usually the public—that both resonates with the needs of the public and suits the issuer's—in this case, the churches'—goals. Outreach plans are typically exercised by organizations for "increasing membership, gaining community recognition, or encouraging action among … neighbors (Family Pride N.d.:2).

Tiffany of Grace Presbyterian, for example, "struggles a lot with expecting people just to walk through the doors of [her] church." People, she said, might not have heard of her small church or paid attention to it as they drive down the highway upon which they are located. Thus, she expressed:

> As a church, we need to be in the community and we need to be out and making ourselves available and being active. That's what drew people to Jesus—that He was out and active and involved. That's when people began to say, 'Who's *this* guy?,' and they started following Him. And so if we are going to exemplify that ministry then we need to be out, we need to be involved. I think by creating these fellowship events like *Trunk-or-Treat* or *Movies on the Lawn* or the *Easter Egg Hunt* … that's saying, 'Hey, we are here to be a light and serve this community. It's free. Come and hang out with us. There's no obligation.'

At Grace Presbyterian's trunk-or-treat, which I attended but did not volunteer at, I can attest that the pressure to engage with the Christian faith was minimal. The event was spread out across half an acre surrounding the church; the church and a small table on which rested Christian literature were the only signals of the participants' faiths and the religious theatre within which I found myself. Pamphlets that announced the church, its pastor, and the activities they sponsor populated the table in an unobtrusive—almost unnoticeable—manner. Trunk-or-treats are her and her church's way of showing the public what they have to offer. As Tiffany said, "it's just planting the seeds, letting the community know we're an open vibrant church and we want anybody to come and be a part of it." "We as a church," she said, "are not called to be on our own. We are called to be in the culture and Halloween is part of the culture and so how do we become part of that and become a light and really highlight the positives of it and the excitement of it and the creativity of it?"

Tiffany and her church had been putting on trunk-or-treats for three years by the time of my visit in October of 2011. According to her, "it's become larger—more attendance every year." Several congregants there felt the popularity of trunk-or-treat events rested with the nefarious natures of trick-or-treating candy-givers. I discovered this while I hovered around the food carts eating loads of popcorn and hot dogs for an hour, chatting with the white middle-aged and senior attendants who were preparing the food. I listened to stories about how the world has changed. I introduced myself and told them of my study, and

found that conversations with them revolved around how Halloween trick-or-treating has morphed from a fun, carefree public event to one where one need be wary of criminals in our midst. "We can't do things like when we were kids in the eighties and sixties," remarked white fifty-something, Mason, "for now you don't know what people are putting in your food." He then handed me another bag of popcorn.

However, "diversity," and not "strangers," is what Tiffany cites as the biggest change in her geographical community over its recent past:

> It's just become so much more diverse. And it's not just black, white, Hispanic. It's that every nationality is represented in our neighborhood surrounding here. It becomes a running joke to try and figure out the different accents of people who call the church […] If we can just learn to appreciate that and to learn from that—it's just exciting to consider all the different possibilities.

Such openness, perhaps, is reflective of a twenty-something woman like Tiffany, who has travelled as far as Zimbabwe and Asia for mission work. By her own account, because of her experiences, she is "able to have a larger worldview than … other people my age or just people in general." She and Grace Presbyterian hosted a "huge [World] Mission Fair" the weekend after trunk-or-treat that featured foods and booths from peoples the world over; she thought, "it will be neat to celebrate all the different ethnicities and cultures that are so different from ours."

"This church is majority middle-class white," she explained to me, and it has been difficult for her ministry to comingle Hispanic and middle-class American 'styles' of religiosity, despite the signage on the roadside of her church that broadcasts, in Spanish, "The good Pastor speaks Spanish." However, she said, "I do have great hopes for our upcoming generations because they are doing such a better job not even looking at race and differences." She wanted every person who comes to Grace Presbyterian to feel welcome, and not like a minority. "That," she felt, "is a goal for me."

When I asked how diversity affected Grace Presbyterian's presence in the community, she admitted, "I think, unfortunately, that what it did for this church is it made it a country club." When she first arrived six years ago, she thought to herself, "We are like this little closed group being surrounded by

people that are so very different … and we're not doing anything to change. It's like, 'You guys just closed the doors of your country club.'" She decried this to her fellow congregants: "'We've really got to wake this congregation up because [we're] going to die if [we] continue doing this." Henceforth, instead of sending postcards announcing their events only to their "privileged" congregants, Grace Presbyterian began to invite the entire community using property-front signage and local press advertisements. It worked. Since, she affirmed, the church has "just come alive": ethnicities and accents abound.

Minister Iris of Watery Run Baptist Church expressed to me in words of a similar vein: "We started the event a few years back because we used to try and put on a fall festival which brought people in." Iris, who was raised in rural West Virginia, had noticed that all of the upscale neighborhood enclaves in her freshly reinvigorated geographical environs, the Atlanta suburb of Watery Run, hosted their own trick-or-treats; rarely, she told me in her relaxed, yet well-dictioned Southern drawl, would trick-or-treaters venture far from their own encapsulated area of houses. "So few worship together," she be-moaned. "Trunk-or-treat," she said, "allows her parish the opportunity to meet one another's family and make connections among parishioners." For her, putting names and faces together stimulates "a lot of positive energy": "I see a lot of good interaction with other church friends; it's a time of fellowship."

Iris' part of town, located in the northeastern part of metropolitan Atlanta area, has grown rapidly during the last sixteen years of her station as children's minister at Watery Run; Forsyth County, where the church is located, has had record growth, she informed me. According to her, "mostly upper-class white folks" and "some pretty significant pockets of Asian folks" now inhabit the area. Her church offers free enrichment classes[16] to newly migrated individuals and their children and these classes are highly sought after. Her church's trunk-or-treats have been popular, too: for the last ten years, five- to seven-hundred people have shown up at every one. "I guess we're fillin' a niche for folks," she appended.

[16] Enrichment classes are supplemental educational programs intended to make the transition to living in the US easier for immigrants and new citizens. They include piano and voice lessons in addition to instruction in English and various arts and hobbies.

Kelly from Ephesus First Baptist spoke about "drawing people in" when I asked about her church's reasons for hosting their *Not So Scary Fall Festival and Trunk-or-Treat*. Sometimes they spend upwards of ten-thousand dollars to host the events, of which they see no immediate fiscal return. They do, however, note a surge in membership when their trunk-or-treats are well-received. She confided that trunk-or-treat "presents an opportunity for people that are not part of the church to experience religious or spiritual people in a way that's not threatening." "It's a way for us to get to know people," said Kelly, "without being completely in their faces about 'Hey, you should join this church!'" Hundreds of local residents from all walks of life answer this subtle call every fall, arrive at her church annually every Wednesday before Halloween for trunk-or-treat, and sometimes join.

Ephesus is located in Decatur—a populous satellite city six miles from Atlanta's heart—at a busy intersection with a four-way traffic light in and equipped with a spacious rolling lawn with nearly one-hundred yards on each of two sides that provides them plenty of room for advertising signage They utilize this yardage and other means to announce their upcoming events:

> We try to communicate events that we're doing to our parents at the *First School*, which is the pre-school that is housed in the building downstairs. So we communicate it there for sure. And we try to do as much community advertisement, as well, using our [two] marquees outside, sometimes using different poster-type things, and a lot of word-of-mouth-type things. And the front lawn is really good for advertising events, for just seeing a group of people on the lawn. Sometimes people just walk up because of it.

Trunk-or-treats function like other events they invite the community to. The church annually puts on a huge yard sale, for example, that I have rummaged through on many occasions. "Yeah, that's a big one," Kelly retorted after its mention. She said, "Lots of people who do not attend this church come to this yard sale and hear about something we're doing and end up staying." She said half of the arrivals are people she's never seen. Her church's congregation is comprised of "primarily whites," she told me, "many of whom hold Master's and Doctoral degrees." However, she tendered to me the fact that people come from beyond the perimeter (outside of the circular I-285 Atlanta Bypass that surrounds the city) to

attend her church and that this adds to the diversity to which Ephesus First Baptist ministers. At the trunk-or-treat, I met several white and black seniors and made small talk with two young women from Africa, one with a child. Her name was Kyla; she and her son are newly migrated. They don't celebrate Halloween, I was told; they just come to be social, to see what the other kids are doing. Such is the draw and acculturative force of the national phenomenon known as Halloween.

In 2003, Nativity United Methodist Church was looking for different ways to bring in the community. Ex-elementary school teacher and current children's minister, Kendra, shared with me that trunk-or-treat is one of their biggest community outreaches. When asked why she and Nativity United host the event, she replied, "Just outreach to the community—bringing people to our church and to a Christian event. To see who[m] we can touch. People come and they enjoy it and they'll see the friendliness and then come back."

Her congregation consists mostly of white middle to upper class locals; however, the church has ended up ministering to a variety of people that have traveled from as far as Alabama and Florida for past trunk-or-treats and then later returned. Since their trunk-or-treat succeeds at bringing in the local community as well as those afar, they "advertise it real big" in local newspapers and on Christian websites. When we met for our interview, she graciously showed me page after page of trunk-or-treat sign-up sheets from their past and explained:

> We had about six-hundred here last year. We even have a spreadsheet from where people come from. We have a sign-in sheet so we can get their name and email. And it gives our pastor an opportunity if they are looking for a church he's aware of it. We bill it as one of our biggest community outreaches of the year!

The church spent about fifteen-hundred dollars on their trunk-or-treat in 2011, but only brought in five-hundred and sixty dollars in return revenue from registrants that partook of their hotdogs and refreshments. The church timed their non-traditional worship service, *Revive!*, to coincide with trunk-or-treat's end in order to coax participants to experiment with her faith in a relaxed, candle-lit, and pillow-

laden service at her church's gym. This gathering is a conversational mass where "the Scripture's presented and it's open for discussion; you respond to what's being talked about."

2011 was the third year for Bridge of Souls' trunk-or-treat. By way of the event, the independent church aims to open its doors to the community. "Fifty-something" children's minister, Betsy, opined that "some people really do trunk-or-treat at churches as an evangelistic tool—for them to come in and meet people who don't have a church or would like to come to church"; however, she told me that's not the main reason why Bridge of Souls hosts theirs: "It's really an opportunity for us to have fun and our goal is to just invite our friends and neighbors to come with us," she said. She was in no rush to announce the event to the public, for she advertised it scantily and had only just put out the sign announcing the trunk-or-treat two days prior to the event.

Betsy does tip her hat occasionally during the interview, hinting at the subtle evangelism infused into the Bridge of Souls' event: "I think initially it's an opportunity to get other people in the community to see us, but then I think … it's more about them participating and having a great time!" Such a lax approach toward building up the ranks of her church effervesces with Betsy's jovial attitude. "I think Americans like to celebrate," she said. "I think if we had a holiday every month we'd probably celebrate something!" She touched once again, however, upon trunk-or-treat's evangelistic potential, foiling it against an advertised mass: "It's smaller; it's a little more friendly, and … might be the segue to say … 'I might like to go to church there.'"

Loretta from Bridge of Souls told me trunk-or-treat "draws people, so we don't do a lot of marketing." She thinks the church should promote the event more heavily; however, she also feels that "we are the light, and as we go out into the community … people will be naturally drawn to that, and so we don't do a lot of campaigning." Despite her confidence in the 'luminescent gravity' of her faith, she admits that area ministers in Duluth and Gwinnett County meet often with Christian community groups to discuss how things are changing in their environments demographically, and how they are impacting the growth of faith communities throughout. "Churches," she told me, "are starting to deal with some issues that they've never had to deal with before." A large influx of immigrants—"some Asian, some Hispanic,

some African-American [*sic*],” she says—have accompanied a recent surge in sex trafficking and drug smuggling. “The crime used to be hidden,” black parent Paul remarked, “now it’s out in the open.”

In our discussion, Bromwich United Methodist’s children’s minister, Tara, informed me of meetings that take place among Methodist ministers and pastors in Conyers, Georgia in Rockdale County to discuss similar issues, as well as membership diminution. Membership in her church and other Methodist churches has decreased in recent years; all of them are “trying to get a hold of what’s going on.” Perhaps it has something to do with what Dana detailed for me at our first meeting:

> In the early to mid-nineties, there was a whole bunch of white flight. A couple of things happened all at once. One thing was that Oprah Winfrey put in *O* magazine, as well as said it in her talk show, that Conyers, Georgia was the place to be for young affluent African-American families—safe, right outside of the city, sort of presented as the land of plenty and the land of opportunity. Then, the economy failed, and so we have a lot of people expecting—they borrowed more money expecting—so lots of higher expectations became dashed when they figured out what the reality of it was. So with that houses aren’t going to be worth that much and the school systems are going to go to pot—and that is only thinly veiled in racism to be frank.

With the “white flight” left the Methodists; with the African-Americans and blacks arrived Baptists and what are termed by ARIS and the US Census as ‘African-American churches’. In their county, Rockdale, between 2000 and 2009, there was a 170 percent rise in the “Black” population and a -15.6 percent decrease in “White Alone” (Georgia Statistics System 2012:1). Not only representative of ethnic and religious backgrounds, this turnover heralded other changes in the Conyers area. As Tara expressed, with more stores and rental properties came more crime—“all those things that feed into your community growing.”

For both ministers, Bromwich’s trunk-or-treat is an attempt to counter this decline. “We have to embrace that change if we’re going to be a viable church,” expressed Dana. For her, that means an increase in the provision of foods and freebies at their outreach events, the sharing of which, she feels, stimulates camaraderie and community. Tara glossed the Methodist church as the “church of tolerance,” and well-represented by Bromwich United Methodist’s own long-standing motto, “*Open Hearts, Open*

Minds." Somewhat alarmed by their dwindling congregation, she opined that her church merely needs to become more accepting of people from different stations of life. She conceived of Bromwich's trunk-or-treating event as an "opportunity to put our best foot forward because the community's coming and they count on it." She elaborated:

> [Trunk-or-treat]'s a celebration in my mind, and I guess it was okay with the Methodist church to do that, to have that, and to be inviting the community to see what we're all about and seeing if they're interested and seeing what our facility is all about and we have these other things going on because [former children's minister, Dana] would have a packet or a paper or something that. Once they've signed in, before they do the trunk-or-treat, they would have knowledge about the events that are going on at our church—when we have our services, or any upcoming things that are going on, or that we have a pre-school, anything that we can show what we got going on at our church—in the hopes that, if they don't already have a church home, they might be interested in coming and seeing what we're all about. It's an outreach to the community.

Christians of the Methodist and Baptist denominations, it appears, are becoming less populous. In 1990, 12 percent of Georgia reported that they were Methodist; by 2008, the number of people claiming this creed had decreased by 4 percent—to 8 percent (American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS) 2012:1). The Baptist church has suffered from dwindling ranks in the last decade or so, as well. In 1990, the Baptist presence in Georgia was announced as being 51 percent; by 2008, only 41 percent remained (American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS) 2012:1).

Betsy, Loretta, and others at Bridge of Souls referred to their church as "non-denominational," which is a rising response that ARIS has received from informants for nearly the last twenty years. "Fewer than two-hundred thousand favored this term in 1990," the survey announced, "but in 2008 it accounts for over eight million Americans" (Kosmin and Keysar 2009:6). Thus, perhaps, is the reason why both Betsy and Loretta—non-denominational Christians—conceived of the function of their trunk-or-treat as fun-generating rather than as congregant-replenishing. They need only sit back and watch as their faith community grows.

It is not, I believe, coincidental that trunk-or-treats came into existence only in the last ten years or so in this region of Georgia. With all of the aforementioned social change in the Atlantan suburbs of those I interviewed, the addition of trunk-or-treats to churches' menus of outreach events would seem a logical step. Trunk-or-treats empower churches to regain some of the membership they have lost due to multiple trends of attrition.

5 CONCLUSION

The individuals I met with organize their lives around Christ; their worlds hinge on the belief that there is a reality beyond what any sense can detect and outside of what any science can contain—what some might array as religion. However, as Casanova (2001:415) proffered, "sacred time can only happen within worldly time"; thus, just as others do, my informants participate in social and economic dynamics and must find practical means to solve their problems. Trunk-or-treat rituals have helped my informants actualize that which sates their needs. Rituals serve a function, and are not merely perfunctory; less are they, still, "settled social procedures drawn from tradition or custom" (Swatos N.d.:1). As I have entreated the reader to consider early on in this paper, rituals may be prescribed in words, but ever do they undulate in time as they unfold, eager to serve culturally determined ends and to answer the specific social situations of practitioners (Bell 1997:ix, xi). By drawing attention to my informants' lived experiences in the areas they inhabit, I have evidenced this. I have conveyed how some Christian Atlantans feel about their place in the world, have highlighted the constraints in which they operate, and have shown some of the ways they overcome them. Hence, I elicit a sense of how they construct their own histories and, thus, the efficacy of ritual practice (Ortner 1984:159).

Trunk-or-treats are rituals that further the Christian presence of those in the suburban locales I researched. As outreach events added to some Atlantan churches' calendars, trunk-or-treat events can augment both the visibility and membership of the hosting churches. People drive from miles around to attend them; some join the hosting church. Trunk-or-treats here are socially integrative, bringing congrega-

tions and faith communities together with those in their surrounding neighborhoods and communities. The events often conjoin corporate entities—churches—with law enforcement in a collective enterprise of civic engagement, thereby extending to participants the ability to celebrate Halloween under the auspices of safety. Stripped of what is deemed harmful to children through sight or by sound, these trunk-or-treats are attractive options for parents and guardians wary of the gore and objectionable symbolism that typically accompany the Halloween season. Moreover, through the events, these Christians exercise and explore aspects of their Christian identities dutifully, as disciples of Christ contracted to furthering their religious ministry, and playfully, by relaxing the intensity of their ministerial personas and experimenting with alternative forms of material and sensual self-expression.

Accordingly, the public–private dichotomy can be dissolved into fractal recursivity, whereby its indexical properties are collapsed and subsumed under the arc of ambient (Gal 2002; Engelke 2012). This notion of ambient space, when infused with the sensual and material expressions of evangelical religions, gives rise to ambient faith (Engelke 2012). Via utilization of ambient faith, some evangelical Christians who host trunk-or-treats in suburban Atlanta not only make the natures of their convictions known, but also are able to expand their social networks and faith communities. By doing so, they are further able to incidentally provide safe spaces for Halloween celebrations, and reckon with budding symbolic systems in the process.

Margaret Mead, writing of Halloween decades ago, asked, "can children celebrate in ways that are safe and still have fun" (Mead 1980:201)? The answer is a resounding yes: in addition to their get-ups, expressions of delight were donned by most of the trunk-or-treating children I encountered. Although having cited the disappearance of tricks and pranks that had once accompanied the holiday, Mead called for a "new ethic of protectiveness in our communities" in light of the rumors of poisoned Halloween candies that fettered her day (Mead 1980:207). Trunk-or-treats, at least in part, are an answer to that call. Fast-forward to the present day and consider, as minister, Iris, had pointed out to me, that a good number of children that participate in trunk-or-treats know nothing other than them, and will likely pass the rituals' formulae on to their children. All the while, the events are growing in popularity. One might think

that trunk-or-treats, sequestered to the daylight hours and confined to church parking lots, might someday obviate the need for a state apparatus of policing on the nights surrounding Halloween, but that is not so. I have highlighted how social fear has permeated my Christian informants' lives. Halloween is a time when crime appears statistically imminent, a time when poisoners and convicted sex offenders are overemphasized members of our society. Like those informants of Low's (2004:63, 213) who, bastioned behind the walls of their residential enclaves, were still reliant on their alarm and video monitoring systems for peace of mind, trunk-or-treat hosts still depend on partnerships with law enforcement agencies, background checks, and government sex offender databases to quell their insecurities.

Moreover, one must consider: the United States Congress has "statutorily established [eleven] permanent federal holidays" (Stathis 1999:CRS-1); Halloween—celebrated in the U.S. since the mid-nineteenth century—is not one of them. The holiday is normally observed on October 31, regardless of the day of the week that date falls upon. However, over the last century, in response to localized criminal activities, some communities, churches, and the civic agencies that govern them, have opted to either alter the date of its observance or banish the holiday from their calendar altogether. Others have instituted private events to sidestep Halloween's attendant ritual, trick-or-treat. They do so to avoid criminals whom they believe take to the streets on Halloween night purposely, intent to commit heinous acts. The most vulnerable of our kind are out in full force on this night: children; criminals, aware of this—as most in the US believe—shall be, too (Chaffin, et al. 2009; Durling 2006; Einhorn 2008).

Nevertheless, one should not be so quick to submit Christian churches' trunk-or-treats solely as exemplary case-studies of this above-mentioned paranoia, at least not in the New South suburbs of Atlanta, Georgia. Churches here have other fish to fry: they struggle to augment their membership to secure themselves tithes; pitted against an undulating religious landscape, they strive to enculturate to thwart obsolescence; above all, they endeavor, by deed and by word, to effuse the light of their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. These are the tasks that test their mettle; these are their motives for trunk-or-treats.

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