

Weekend reflections

in partnership with WMFF and BCF

3 November

Focussing on the Good

Trick or Treat, monster masks, costumes and horror movies, we have had the lot this week. It's been impossible to avoid the Halloween paraphernalia in our shops. This annual celebration of the dark and the sinister is now so commercialised that for many retailers it is the third most profitable event of the year!

Thank heavens that the chief executives of Asda and Sainsbury's have responded positively to the Bishop of Bolton's request that supermarkets rethink how they market Halloween to children by offering alternatives to the usual ghoulish range. Thank heavens too that there are still a few shops that hold out against the commercial pressure and refuse to stock any Halloween goods at all.



Without an alternative, the overwhelming presence of ghoulish goods in our shops pressurises the young into celebrating with things that are representative of evil. Is this really what is best for the physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of our children?

During 'All Hallows' - or as it is better known, 'All Saints' - the church has been rejoicing in the faith of godly men and women from the past that we, like they, may live in the light of God's love shown through Jesus Christ. Some churches held 'Alternative' All Hallows children's parties, focusing on the positive and the good and by so doing have echoed the biblical imperative for a healthy, positive and spiritually alert life. "Whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things."

Revd John Self has for the last 15 years been Vicar of St John the Evangelist in Sparkhill, prior to which he spent many years working in the desert area of Sind Province with the Church of Pakistan.

10 November

The Diwali Season

DIWALI, the Hindu (and Sikh) festival of lights, is gaining popularity these days for its display of colour, dance and music. However, to a practising Hindu, the true significance lies in the spiritual build up to it and the performance of religious duties during it.



The five-day period starts at home with prayers for the continued creation of wealth in the family. Next day there are prayers to Krishna, who overcame a tyrant ruler, so it is justice and freedom that are commemorated. For some families too the extended family is re-united and rivalries are set aside.

On the third day, Hindus welcome Diwali with colourful candles and decorations. Traditionally this was when Lord Rama returned from exile so it is dedicated to the victory of good over evil and the deliverance from dark to light. Now too bonds and relationships are renewed or we simply turn a new leaf.

On the following day our new year starts - 2064 by the Hindu reckoning. It is marked by exchange of gifts, sweets and good wishes. Community feasts are held at temples to which all families contribute and in which all share. The final day is dedicated to the brother-sister bond when men folk visit their sisters (although nowadays this is put off to the next convenient week end.)

Family is important, as is harmony within it. It is the vital template of society. Get things right here and the peace and cohesion we all long for will follow.

Mahendra Dabhi is President of the Shree Hindu Community Centre and of the Hindu Council of Birmingham. There was a general Diwali celebration at Millennium Point on the Sunday following, attended by the Lord Mayor, The Deputy Leader of the Council, the Chief Executive, and Lord King .

17 November

Thanksgiving



Thanksgiving Day is celebrated around this time in the United States and also in Christian Science churches in this country. It offers a time for grateful reflection for the good received.

Among the things I am grateful for are insights into the spiritual nature of mankind that I have found can result in healing. In four decades of using prayer as the main resource for my own spiritual and physical well-being, I have also observed increasing concern being expressed by others that in the continual development of medical expertise for physical health we shouldn't lose sight of

the benefits of nurturing spiritual well-being.

Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of Christian Science, saw spirituality and health as being linked. In "*Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*" she wrote that the 'calm, strong currents of true spirituality' manifest health.

Inspired religion provides an opportunity to gain meaningful spiritual experience, and there is a beneficial relationship of these experiences to physical well-being. I have found that healing can be realized by gaining an insight into the spiritual nature of God and His loving relationship to all men and women. When consciousness rises from the mundane human view of things to a more spiritual perspective, healing often follows.

At this Thanksgiving period I am grateful for all who work tirelessly for the health and benefit of mankind. The ever-present spiritual laws which can support change for the better are not owned by any one religion, but are freely available to all.

Brian Weatherhogg is a member of Second Church of Christ, Scientist, Birmingham. He is the appointed Christian Science Committee on Publication for the West Midlands. He is also a part time chaplain at Birmingham University, the Birmingham International Airport and the National Exhibition Centre.

24 November

Living among Strangers



WHEN I first came to England from a country in the centre of Europe which in the Second World War had caused untold suffering to the people of this country, I was not sure of a welcome. However, from the beginning I was accepted without prejudice. And today I feel totally at home here through years of active participation in many areas of life, professionally and also at a personal level through voluntary work.

Originally a Lutheran, I was shaped by the Christian worldview and its values and was welcomed into the Methodist Church which became my spiritual home. Christ's commandment to love God and to love one's neighbour has been my guide. The "neighbour" may be anyone who needs my help.

In my teaching career my life has been enriched through encountering people from all walks of life of different races, cultures and religions who were eager to learn about faiths different from their own. This greater understanding fosters more harmonious relationships.

Religions may differ but they all have virtues in common which make human interactions possible: respect for each other, tolerance, compassion, love and peacekeeping. All these are life-enhancing. I have met deeply spiritual and holy people from different religions in this country; they are no strangers but my friends and neighbours.

St. Paul in a famous passage of his letter to the Corinthians sings his great "Ode of Love". Love is eternal. God has planted it in our hearts. May it guide us in our life's journey!

Friederike Rice lives in Sutton Coldfield and has been a teacher in Secondary and Adult Education. Now retired, she is a Council Member of Sutton Coldfield Methodist Church. She also belongs to Soroptimist International, the United Nations Association, Birmingham Council of Faiths and the Global Peace Federation.