

What an African Missionary Who Faces Witchcraft Regularly Can Teach Us About Halloween

Considering this question reminds me of my African colleagues serving in mission hospitals. These doctors don't grapple with evil practices once a year. They encounter it every day. Sorcery and witchcraft are rooted in their culture. Traditional African medicine bases itself not on science, but on witchcraft, sorcery and cultural dogma.

Three years ago, I went to a mission hospital in the Saharan Desert to train surgeons. Andrew, a second-year resident, wheeled a 12-year-old girl in for an operation. Three weeks prior, she had suffered an open femur fracture from a motorcycle wreck. The broken bone pierced the skin and required immediate surgical attention. But the family took her to a witch doctor. He performed an incantation, wrapped the girl's leg with tight dressing, and sent her home.

Now—possibly too late—the girl showed up in our operating room. The tourniquet placed by the witch doctor had cut off the circulation to her leg. Infection had spread through her body causing early organ system failure.

I started unraveling the girl's dressing. Repulsed by an odor hitting my nostrils harder than a left hook, I retched, stepped aside and let Andrew remove the witch doctor's tourniquet. Pus oozed around her mummified skin. Beneath the dead skin lay rotten and gangrenous muscles. We had only one option to save the girl's life. An above-knee amputation.

Andrew performed the surgery while I assisted. Initially, the operation progressed—until the generator shut off. The room

went dark. The ventilator, which pushed air into the girl's lungs, stopped working. Our anesthetist moved air into her lungs by squeezing on a bag of oxygen. With his other hand, he directed the light of his cellphone into the wound. We pushed on in the darkness and finished the surgery.

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The girl survived. She stayed three weeks in the hospital, heard the gospel and was healed. Inside and out. When I think about that young girl and the power of evil, I am reminded of the unsurpassable greatness of God's power. Through the power of Christ, good overcame evil. Someone dared to shine the light in a dark place.

Last year on a return trip, I heard Andrew's story. After his mother died of AIDS, Andrew's father abandoned him. His grandmother, a witch in Tanzania, took him in. During his childhood, Andrew watched grandma perform incantations. She wanted Andrew to follow in her footsteps. With tears in his eyes, Andrew recalled Grandma's hexes, the ones she performed to empower his sorcery and shackle him to a life of witchcraft.

God had a different plan. Disregarding his grandmother's threats of murder, spells and sorcery, a friend shared Jesus with Andrew. And Andrew became a born-again Christian. He moved away for college, grew in faith and went to medical school. He applied for a position in a PAACS hospital where doctors are trained not only to be surgeons, but followers of Christ. Now, Andrew shares his faith, hones his surgical skills and ministers to Muslims in a country closed to the gospel.

What would Andrew say about our Halloween debate? Although he would not condone participating in evil practices, Andrew

would tell us to take advantage of every opportunity to do good. He would remind us to shine the light of Jesus in dark places. Andrew's life shows the impact someone can make when they take risks and share their faith. Andrew's life reminds us that we shouldn't fear Satan, witches, evil practices or Halloween:

"You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

God permits evil to show His goodness. He created Lucifer and sustains him until judgement. Martin Luther said it well: "Even the devil is God's devil."

Believers have opportunities—to change attitudes and challenge presuppositions about the gospel, the church and Jesus—this Halloween. Like Andrew's friend who risked having spells cast on him, we have nothing to fear. Satan and his works are defeated. Empowered by the Spirit and enlightened by the Word, we are given the ministry of reconciliation.

We can engage our culture and still live a separated lifestyle. We are called to be separated—not isolated from the world. Let's model our faith in relational, charitable and encouraging ways. Attend a harvest festival or a trunk-or-treat event sponsored by a church. Hand out gospel literature with your goodies to those who come to your door.

Here's a great idea: Unmask yourself. Take the first step. Introduce yourself to someone who may be different from you. Start a friendship. Then follow God's guidance. Who knows? The relationships you form in this collision of cultures may lead someone one step closer to Christ.

Surveys show alarming trends in how the church and the gospel are perceived in the United States.

Young Americans are less open to the church than ever before.

Young adults are more skeptical of the church's role in our culture, seeing it as irrelevant.

Most of the unchurched would rather attend an activity rather than a weekend church service.

These negative perceptions can be dispelled with some intentional witness on Halloween. Skeptics can rub shoulders with the church without ever walking through its doors. They can see how believers live in community and engage the social issues in our society. They can observe the impact of how knowing Christ makes a difference.

Let's remember Andrew, the authority we've received, our calling as ambassadors, the changing culture we live in and the possibilities Halloween presents. The mission is the same here as in Africa. Let's carry the light. {eoa}

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Dr. Charles W. Page is known as "the best guy to see on the worst day of your life." A surgeon, author and storyteller, Dr. Page has authored several children's books, a book exploring sleep from a Christian perspective and a new series of books titled "A Spoonful of Courage." The first book—A Spoonful of Courage for the Sick and Suffering—just released in summer of 2019. [Click here to connect with Dr. Page:](#) .