

Belief in black magic and witchcraft

Religion



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The sources of magic are to be found in passion and ignorance - which make up the greater part of man. Desire, ever reborn, never capable of being sated in the ordinary conditions of life, inspires in the mind the dream of an irresistible power whereby every appetite may be satisfied; and ignorance of the inflexible laws which govern nature suffers one to believe that she can be mastered and modified in conformity with that dream, which, when it has reached a certain degree of intensity, tends spontaneously to transform itself into action.

Love, hatred, the desire for health, for riches, for power, for knowledge itself, are the causes which produce magic, and they are its perpetual incentives; whence it comes that we see magic practiced wherever men are found; in the most remote antiquity, during the Middle Ages, and at the present time; not only among barbarian or savage peoples, but also among those races which call themselves civilized. Magic is, therefore, a social phenomenon. This work will show what place black magic and witchcraft holds among the other social phenomena, for example religion.

The ideas related to a concept of the sacred, as the basis of magic and witchcraft, will be considered. Why do people believe in the powers of black magic and the fearful power of Satan in black magic? How are these practices performed? Here is nothing else that can give so adequate answer as does the history of the witches and black magic and their place in Holy Mother Church. Witchcraft is a complex subject, and has evoked complex responses from many disciplines (Glucklich 391).

There are theological, historical, philosophical, anthropological, legal, literary, pharmacological, and psychological theories of witchcraft, to name
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some of the major ones. That is the reason why few people today can agree on what witchcraft really is, or was, or what witches really did, or what they do. During the height of the witchcraft scare in Europe, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, almost anything strange and fearful was attributed to witchcraft. A good example is the phenomenon called the poltergeist.

Witchcraft would seem to be a European term of opprobrium which has been used in scattergun fashion for all sorts of threatening manifestations, whether at home or abroad. It is appropriate, and inevitable, that our inquiry should have brought us to the Bible. For while it is false to say, as some writers have, that the witch persecutions were carried on solely by the church, it is nevertheless undeniable that historical witchcraft received its definition from the church. In a sense it may be said that witchcraft as a system was created by the church.

Convenience may be cited: it was convenient for the church to lump its own heresies, rival systems of faith, inexplicable spiritual phenomena - in fact, almost all the threats to its own primacy - into a single opposition, which in the slow course of many centuries took on the shape of a hostile conspiracy and the name of witchcraft. The church had, after all, ready to hand the Supreme Enemy of Man, Satan, acknowledged as the father of all error, the prince of the world's vanities, and arch rebel against God (Butler 96). There was no fault of logic involved in placing him at the source of trouble.

This is the classical definition of witchcraft: a literally diabolic plot against mankind. For long ages it was almost universally accepted. Running concurrently with it was what we may identify as the skeptical position: that the whole thing was nonsense, and an outrageous calumny on the loving

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nature of the Deity. This is an honorable and attractive position, and one which is still dominant today. It can trace its origins to a tiny handful of brave men during the Renaissance, men like Reginald Scot and Johan Weyer, who were in considerable danger for their beliefs.

These ideas however gradually won out, by the eighteenth century, and were elevated almost beyond argument by the busy and progressive nineteenth. Today they are coming under renewed question. There are then at present at least seven major schools of witchcraft thought, some of them frankly hostile to the others: the orthodox, skeptical, anthropological, psychological, pharmacological, transcendental, and occultist. The image is to the object as the part is to the whole.

In other words, a simple object, outside all direct contact and allcommunication, is able to represent the whole. This is the formula which is apparently used in black magic. The image, the doll or the drawing is a very schematic representation, a poorly executed ideogram. Any resemblance is purely theoretical or abstract. Black magic is essentially an individualistic affair. It finds regular and constant use by men and women who work deliberately, by means of the spells they utter, the charms they manipulate, and the rites they perform, to bring misfortunes upon their fellows.

So used it may be licit, reputable, and even praiseworthy, for instance, if the same magical arts that have slain a man are resorted to by an avenger of blood against the slayer. As a rule, however, sorcery is carried on more or less secretly, in defiance of public opinion, and those who practice it are objects of constant suspicion, fear, and enmity. In spite of this radical

monotheism, Islam, like Judaism and Christianity, makes allusions to other supernatural entities.

In the case of Islam, these entities are known as jinns and angels (Glücklich 136). Satan also plays an important role in Islam, but is counted among the angels, albeit the most disobedient. The jinns, according to the Qur'an, are not quite angels, but a form of consciousness between human and angels that are also especially prone to disobedience. Given that a basic idea of Islam is “ submission” or “ obedience” to God, the very act of disobedience is taken very seriously in Muslim teaching as a major form of bad, even sacrilegious, behavior (Brain 241).

The jinn are genii, made out of fire; unlike the angels, they eat, drink, copulate, and die; some are good, and listen to the Koran; most are bad, and spend their time getting human beings into mischief. The leader of the evil jinn is Iblis, who was once a great angel, but was condemned for refusing to pay homage to Adam. The success of Islam in propagating itself, particularly in its Sufic and maraboutic versions, in regions where a direct assault by conquest was impracticable was largely due to its truly catholic recognition of the multiplicity of mystical power.

In the voluminous Quranic store-house of angels, jinns and devils, whose number is legion, many of these traditional powers find a hospitable home; and passages from the Quran are cited to justify their existence as real phenomena. So long as Allah's lofty pre-eminence was not compromised, many local cults could be accommodated within the realm of alghaib, the 'unseen' or 'hidden' world (Brain 258). The supreme deities which exist in many pagan traditions could be assimilated to Allah. Lesser local deities

could be Islamicized or explained away as vernacular terms for God's attributes, or as the jinns or spirits of Quranic folklore.

Orders of devils are spoken of in the so-called Book of Enoch, which antedates Christianity; and they are spoken of, later, in the New Testament. Saint Thomas makes express mention of higher and of lower devils, and of systematically established ranks among them; without, however, entering into details on the subject (Waite 356). But such reserve, though it might well become theologians in general, did not at all suit those who were especially classed as demonographers or those who gave attention to the study and practice of magic.

For all these, it was of the utmost importance to become thoroughly acquainted with the diabolic hierarchy and, at the same time, with the condition and the activities of each rank included therein, - nay, as far as might be possible, with those of each individual demon. Furthermore, the principles of their organization were not understood in the same way by all; and while some of the Fathers thought that their rank was determined according to the various kinds of sins that the demons fostered, others believed that this was done according to their degree of power and method of action.

Those who made pacts with the Devil very often did so in order to be able to practice the forbidden arts of magic; but the pact did not always imply this power and the power might be exercised without a pact. There were cases where the Devil voluntarily obligated himself to do whatever the magician should demand of him, on condition that the latter give him his soul in exchange; there were also cases where the magician by virtue of his own art

forced the Devil to do what the fiend, of himself, would have been neither obliged nor willing to do.

There were then, as we see, two kinds of magic, which have not been sufficiently distinguished by writers on the subject, but which in their origins, if not in their effects, were entirely distinct; the one produced by a voluntary subjection of the diabolic power to the will of a human being, the other springing from an actual mastery acquired over that power by the human being, and acquired not through divine permission, but through a science and an art which had their own canons, which were learned through a sort of apprenticeship, and which could be more or less fully possessed - the science and the art of black magic.

The theologians and the doctors declare, it is true, that the inventor of this wicked and deceptive science, of this pernicious art, was none other than Satan himself, who was wont to make use of them for the attainment of his own ends; but we begin to suspect that there is some error in this opinion of theirs, when we see this science and this art employed against their supposed inventor in such fashion that he cannot keep from obeying any one who commands him through them (Stave 196).

A great part of magic presupposes the existence in nature, and the knowledge on the part of man, of hidden forces which have power to move the demons and to bind them. But in whatever way the magician had acquired his formidable power, the exercise of it was sinful and unlawful and brought the transgressors in the end to Hell. Speaking generally, and observing the results they produced, we may consider magicians and witches as allies and coadjutors of Satan.

The first of the magical operations, which opens the way for all the others, is evocation, whereby Satan or one of his subordinate devils is compelled to appear - not a difficult operation if one understood the method, but dangerous to any who undertook it carelessly and without having observed all due precautions. This operation is more commonly performed at night, at the exact hour of midnight; but it could also be performed at high noon, this being the hour at which the noonday demon possesses the greatest vigor.

It takes place where two, three, or four roads meet; in the depths of gloomy forests; on deserted heaths; amid ancient ruins. The evocator seat himself inside a circle (or, for greater safety, three circles) traced on the ground with the point of a sword; and he has to exercise the greatest care not to let the slightest portion of himself project beyond this limit and not to agree to any bargain the Devil might seek to make with him. Many and strange are the formulas of evocation, some very lengthy; some more, some less efficacious; nor are all of them addressed to all the devils.

The slightest omission might suffice to render them entirely ineffective if the demon happened to be tired or in a bad humor. An observation is not out of place here. The Devil presents himself willingly and without much importuning, even to one who summons him informally and in every-day language, and that he often presents himself when one has not even thought of calling him. Magicians and witches are not all of equal cleverness or equal might; as in every other condition of men, in theirs also there existed disparities of power and of rank (Dickie 325).

Notwithstanding this, there is no sorceress so insignificant, no wizard so discredited, that with the aid of their art they could not accomplish

marvelous things, of a sort far beyond all human power and all human knowledge. Should one care to make a list of all the varied operations of the magic art, he would need to produce a volume; and even then he would not succeed in telling everything, for by this art could almost anything be done that might suggest itself to the imagination or become an object of desire.

With potent philters or by employing the aid of clever demons, the magician could awaken love, transform love into hatred, snatch the loved one from her lover, or cause her to fly by night through the air to her lover's arms. He avenged himself on his enemies, or on such as betook themselves to him for help, causing fire to consume their houses, bringing down the storm-wind on their fields, sinking their ships in the sea; or he brought about their death, by thrusting into waxen figures made to resemble them a needle.

Now we turn to the last portion of our study, the new witchcraft cult. Two characteristics seem to identify modern British witches: their love of ceremony and their inherent schismatic tendencies. Both points hold true for witches in America and elsewhere. There seem to be hundreds of contending cults, most of which sooner or later make their professions in print, under such titles as *The Real Witchcraft*, *The Truth About Witchcraft*, and *Witchcraft From the Inside*. Indeed, witches, deprived of the unifying force of persecution, are fighting among themselves as never before.

Meanwhile there are as many different kinds of witchcraft in this country, apparently, as there are covens. All these groups publish industriously. One of the partisans of the modern witchcraft cult is Hans Holzer, the well-known psychic investigator. His book *The Truth About Witchcraft* was brought forward with much din of publicity. And certainly he has penetrated to the

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heart of the contemporary cult; he has eye-witnesses' accounts of initiation ceremonies, rites, celebrations, dress, incantations, and every other detail of witchcraft as it is presently practiced, especially in England and the United States.

With the growth and strengthening of the belief in Satan, magic was destined to acquire new credit and new vigor. Everything that was known or thought to be known about the Devil, about his habits and his purposes, naturally tended to produce this result. He was the ever-living, ever-restless force that surrounded and penetrated all things; the prince of this world; the dominator of perverted nature; he was in every place; he had under his orders an innumerable host, always ready for any undertaking.

With the help of his power, there was no task so hard that it could not be accomplished, no miracle that could not be performed; and this help he rendered without excessive solicitation. It was a well known fact that he would cheerfully join forces with a human being in order to reach more easily the fulfillment of his own designs. The majority became wizards or witches merely by entering his flock and enjoying those benefits and powers in which he was willing to make them sharers. Beside this lower magic, the result of a kind of delegation of power, the