

THE MYSTERY OF MYSTICAL POWER, EVIL MAGIC, WITCHCRAFT AND SORCERY IN AFRICA AND THE CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

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ABSTRACT

With the effects of globalization, changes in the socio-economic, political and religious life in every part of the global village called the earth have been inevitable. In this regard, Africa has not been left behind. Africa like any other continent has been invaded by a world revolution that has affected every aspect of life. What is very interesting, however, is the fact that this change has failed to very much influence the way Africans think concerning the traditional belief in mystical power in its manifestation as divination, magic, witchcraft and sorcery. Africans have gladly accepted many of the changes brought about by western education, Christianity and other religions, science and technology, mass media etc., but they have continued to hold firmly to the belief in the effect of magic, witchcraft and sorcery. This paper argues that magic, witchcraft and sorcery continue to affect the social, economic, political and religious life of the African people yet Christianity, the religion followed by the majority of the Africans has failed to offer any solution. Following the missionary Church, the Church in Africa has condemned the African belief in magic, witchcraft and sorcery as evil and primitive exhorting its followers to ignore such beliefs and practices, but conversely, many African Christians still believe in these manifestations of mystical power. Rather than reputing this African belief and practice, the Church should use it as an avenue of evangelization. Christian evangelization can only be meaningful and relevant if it openly and genuinely considers the culture of the people.

Key Words: African Church; Mystical Power; Magic; Witchcraft; Sorcery

1. INTRODUCTION

Tropical Africa is a haven of numerous beliefs and practices, but it is the belief in mystical power that has continued to be of great concern because as many African beliefs and practices continue to fade away due to the effects of globalization, the belief in mystical power continues to gain prominence as several Africans, including Christians, continue to hold firmly on it. Thus, new religions like Christianity, Islam and others; Western education; globalization and so on; have to some extent, affected the African way of life, but the African belief in mystical power in its manifestation as magic, witchcraft and sorcery has remained intact. For example, Ndunjo (2018), in his study of the impact of evangelical Christians on the traditional life of Tharaka

people of Tharaka Nithi County in Kenya, found that although the Atharaka have accepted Christianity with over 90 percent of them confessing to being Christians, this has not so much affected their belief in traditional mystical power as many of them continue to hold firmly to the belief in *Urogi* (witchcraft); *Araguri* (Medicine men) and *Kumerua i Kirimu* (the traditional rite of being swallowed by a mythical creature, called *Kirimu* usually for boys shortly before initiation). This is regardless of whether they are educated or Christians.

This is the trend that seems to circumnavigate in Africa where Africans will generally accept to be either Christians or Muslims, will go to schools, colleges and universities to get education, will attend modern medical facilities when sick, will take white collar-jobs if available, will use the current currency, will communicate using modern technology, will travel abroad to any country, some of them will even marry foreigners in the guise of being modern, and so on, but when misfortune strikes such as family problems, incurable diseases, losing jobs, accidents, continuous deaths in a family, losses in business, failure to get political seats, and so on, the same African who is a Christian, educated and person of higher status in the society, resorts back to the traditional belief where he or she starts to seek the help of a traditional medicine man/herbalist, seer or a diviner. For instance, a survey carried on by Pew Forum on Religion and Public life in the year 2010, which took place in nineteen African countries, found that while Africans practice either Christianity or Islam in large numbers, the majority remain firmly rooted to their traditional religions which promise them deliverance from the perpetual perilous effects of evil magic, witchcraft and sorcery (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2010). That Africans mainly resort back to their traditional beliefs for solutions, especially in the time of crisis, is what has made Idowu (1967), regard African Traditional Religion as a “Contemporary living reality.” It is the incessant effects of magic, witchcraft and sorcery in Africa that have made African Traditional Religion an adorable religion to many Africans despite the emergence of new religions like Christianity and Islam, as well as the influence of globalization. There are thus many scholars including Idowu (1967), Parrinder (1954), Shorter (1973) and Mugambi & Kirima (1976) among others, who attest to the fact Africans are superficial followers of new religions (like Christianity and Islam), while they remain deeply rooted in their traditional religions. In this regard, the prediction by some western scholars such as Gehman (1989) that there will come a time when African Traditional Religion (ATR) may fade away as a result of the advent of Christianity and secularization is erroneous. ATR will never cease to exist as it is the only religion that can deal with the challenge of magic, witchcraft and sorcery which continue to disturb many Africans regardless of their sex, status, education, social responsibilities or religious orientations.

The Context of Mystical Power in Africa

The belief in mystical power is prominent throughout Africa. Sincerely speaking, there is no African village or town which does not know of this power. This is because in case of anything happening, which Africans are unable to solve, resolve or explain, they always explicate it in terms of mystical power. Mystical power manifests itself in the form of magic, divination, witchcraft, sorcery and other mysterious phenomena that defy scientific, technological,

archeological, etc. explanations. Mystical power implies situations in which mysterious things happen. Usually, it is not very easy to explain them.

I will illustrate this using a few examples from my life experience:

- Four years ago, I heard from my wife that there were two young men who were eating grass in our local market because they had stolen a motor bike. As a scholar and a priest, I could not exactly comprehend how this is possible. I went to see for myself and to my amazement it was a true story. Two young men were busy eating grass and making a noise similar to that of goats. I joined my fellow pastors to pray for them but nothing changed. It was only after their relatives accepted to pay the owner of the motor bike that the lads recovered when the responsible magician reversed the situation.
- In my first posting as a Vicar in a rural parish, I heard that one of my church elders could not die in spite of the fact that he was in comma for months due unknown illness. One of his relatives told me that he will never die because he had charms which protected him from death. To my surprise, only the heart was pumping and he remained in that situation for weeks until a medicine man came and cut his body with a sharp object and that is when the elder died. They told me that such a person can only die if his or her body is cut with a sharp object. The biggest challenge was whether we were supposed to bury him using Church burial rites.
- In a parish at Tharaka in Meru, where I had just reported as a pastor in early 2000, Christians told me that there was a lion that was killing their flock at night and they suspected that it was one of the villagers who had turned himself into beast (lycanthropy) so as to feed on their goats, cows and sheep. One morning the villagers decided to kill the 'lion' that had become a nuisance to them. I went to see for myself. I was so shocked when the dread animal turned to be one of the villagers who was personally known to me and a Christian for that matter.
- In the same parish, some Christians informed me that in the local Primary school which we had sponsored, pupils were falling down in the morning and they would groan the whole day. I went to see for myself and it was a true story. I found many boys and girls lying down groaning in pain. We took them to the nearby dispensary and the nurses confessed to us that this was beyond them. I invited some pastors for prayers and indeed, nothing changed. I asked the head teacher to call for an urgent parent meeting and when we asked the parents whether they knew the cause of this, some confided to us that there was a witch living near the school who was responsible. After a lengthy discussion it was resolved that the witch be called to reverse the situation or face the wrath of the angry parents who would burn all the members of his family and his property. I was so shocked that when the purported witch arrived, he went to a certain point within the compound and removed some funny things, then promised us that all will be well after a few minutes. Within thirty minutes all the affected pupils were back to normal.
- I was in upper Primary school in late 1980s, when my uncle got a job as a teacher after completing his training at Meru Teachers' College. He fell sick immediately and started to complain of unending stomachaches. He went to several clinics and hospitals for treatment but could not get well. One day, my late grandmother decided to take him to

the 'hospital' and I followed them. We walked for more than ten kilometers and eventually arrived at the home of a traditional herbalist/medicine man. They entered into a small room in the medicine man's homestead. My grandmother did not want me to enter into the room, but the medicine man allowed me in. I saw him do several things to my uncle, while chanting several words repeatedly. At the end of the exercise, he gave my uncle a 'mirror' to see who was responsible for his sickness. I was not allowed to see it but I saw my uncle cry hysterically. He was asked to pay KES. 600, a white chicken and a black he-goat for his healing. We went home to look for these things and as we walked home I could hear my grandmother curse my elder aunt whom they claimed was responsible. I heard them say that my aunt who was also teacher and church elder had become a witch. After about a week they took the things they were asked to pay by the medicine man. What was shocking was that within two weeks my uncle was completely healed from the disease which doctors and nurses in the hospitals had failed to treat.

To an outsider these stories sound more like fiction than reality. But to anybody who has lived in real contact with Africans, these and many other stories are real. Mbiti (1969) affirms that every African living in a village can tell an almost endless number of such stories. The whole psychic atmosphere of African village life is filled with belief in this mystical power. There is no African who is not aware of this power or force in which scientifically unexplainable things happen. It is difficult to know exactly what it is or how it functions. As Mbiti (1969, p.197) correctly avers, there is no African society which does not hold belief in mystical power. Gehman (1989) points to the fact that this mystical power is experienced in every village and city. Some Africans who convert to Christianity or get educated may for one for one reason or another pretend that they are not aware of this mystical power, but in reality they have been affected by it either directly or indirectly and they know it.

In April last year (2019) as I was gathering material for this paper, I decided to visit a diviner who also works as a medicine man. Diviners deal with the question of finding out why something has gone wrong. They tell who may have worked evil magic, witchcraft or sorcery against a person (Mbiti, 1991, p.157). When I reached there, I was shocked by the number of people who were waiting to be attended by him. I counted more than two hundred (200) clients waiting for him. The number of cars and motor bikes parked in his compound could tell the class of these people. Interestingly, I knew some of them. Some were well known church leaders in my village and others were well educated people. This is the reality in Africa. Whether educated or not, committed Christians or not, a person of a high status or not, and so on, Africans believe in the effects of the mystical power in its manifestation as witchcraft, sorcery or evil magic and will try by all means to counter these effects. The divider told me that the people who usually go to see him are the sick, those who have lost their property through theft, those who have cases in courts, politicians who want to get political seats and gain political influence, religious leaders seeking to gain more followers and control, business people seeking their businesses to prosper, people with marital problems, the barren and so on. Foreign expatriates notably, the missionaries, anthropologists, explorers and colonial authorities condemned these African beliefs and practices, and dismissed Africans who practiced them as social misfits and pagans, but the reality as confirmed by Akama and Kadeyi (2006) is that the belief in mystical power has

significantly affected the social, economic, political and spiritual developments of the African peoples to date. Thus, it is not be very easy to talk of Christianization of Africa, stability of families, economic empowerment of the people, good health, political stability, and so on, without thinking of the forces of evil magic, witchcraft and sorcery which Africans consider as the main hindrance to their social, economic, political and spiritual progress.

Mystical power in Africa is displayed in many ways. This may be expressed through words, especially from a senior person to a junior one in terms of age, social status or position in office (Mbiti, 1969). For example, the words of parents to children carry a significant amount 'power', especially when uttered in the time of crisis. Among the Ameru, children will by all means avoid 'bad' words by their parents. It is believed that if parents die having said such words to the child, the later becomes mad or even dies. On the other hand, parents can say 'good' words to their children if they treat them well, especially during old age or sickness. Such words usually cause good fortune, blessings and success to the children. As Mbiti (1969, p.197) confirms, formal 'curses' and 'blessings' are extremely potent; and people can move many miles to receive blessings and conversely, they take extra care to avoid formal curses.

Religious specialists such as the medicine men, diviners, mediums and rain makers possibly work through words they utter more than the physical rituals they perform. For example, the medicine man gives herbs to the victim, but it is the words he says that cures rather than the actual herbs. Last year (2019), when there was a serious drought in many parts of East Africa, I went to see a rain maker praying for rain at Igembe in Meru County. In the rainmaking ceremony of *Gwita Mbura* (Calling for rain), the rain maker performed several rituals, which involved putting some water in a calabash and sprinkling it into the air whilst repeatedly chanting words which I could not understand. It is these words that evoke God to bring rain rather than the actual physical ritual of sprinkling the water. Similarly, Bernadi (1959) gives the process involved by *Mugwe* (The Ameru Prophet) to bless people. He says that the rite of blessing consists of a ritual which entails sipping a mouth of honey-bear and gently spitting it on to the people. As the *Mugwe* does this, he says these words:

<i>Burogia into</i>	May your things increase,
<i>Mburi, Ngombe, Mweere, Uuki</i>	Goats, cattle, millet, honey,
<i>Na uria uti nabio,</i>	and if one does not have them,
<i>nawe agie .</i>	let him have.

The words of *Mugwe* are extremely potent and they are the ones that bring blessings.

Jomo Kenyatta informs us that among the Gikuyu community, the hunter on desiring the magical power for protection against fierce wild animals and enemies of all kinds goes secretly to the magician to provide him with charms. The magician prescribes magic for his client. He takes some powders made from various herbs, then mixes these with some magical particles and finally puts the required quantity into a small, narrow horn. While doing this he recites some

magical words swinging the horn ritually round his head and then sealing it (Kenya, 1938, pp. 271-272). These words are the ones that make the charm effective. Before the hunter begins his work in the forest, he passes the magic over his left shoulder and between his legs up and down and seven times, he utters the following ritual words:

Riu ndemogitere mogwati moothe, gotire nyamo njoru engenguhhereria. Reke mogwati moothe magarorwo ne meruke eo ndahuhokia na gethiito geke. Nderigita na gethiio geke ndikoneke ne tho one emwe.

(I am now protected from all dangers. There is no bad animal which will approach me. Let all dangers be turned away by the breath which I blow over this charm. I cover myself with this magical power that no enemy can see me) (Kenya, 1938, p. 274).

The words by the hunter are powerful and they are the ones that make the spell effective. Without uttering these words he cannot be assured of the protection from the charm. Thus words have mystical power and Africans will by all means avoid words that are likely to bring misfortunes, curses, bad omen, sorrow, and so on. At the same time they relish words that bring blessings, good fortune, success, and so on.

According to Mbiti (1969), there is a mystical power that causes people to walk on fire flames without getting burnt, to lie on thorns or nails without getting pierced, to harm people from a distance, to change into dangerous beasts which can hurt people or their property, to change non-living things into living creatures, to see into hidden secrets, to detect thieves or even stupefy them so that they are caught unaware and to foretell the future.

Anderson (1986) regards to this mystical power as 'numinous power', while Gehman (1989) uses the Melanesian term *mana* to refer to this scientifically unexplainable force which greatly influences the lives of the Africans. Quoting Paul Hiebert, Gehman (1989, p. 86) describes *mana* as an invisible force pervading the universe and is found in gods, men, animals and natural objects such as mountains, stones and trees. He then goes on to argue that "This *mana* is essentially what is spoken of as mystical power in African Traditional Religion (ATR)". It is of course debatable as to whether this description of mystical power fits in ATR. This is because in essence ATR is a monotheistic religion and so Gehman and Hierbert's argument that this power is found in gods put the whole argument into disarray. I would like to refer to this power as 'Mysterious power' as it entails strange happenings which have remained unexplainable scientifically or technologically.

I asked the diviner/medicine man whom I had visited where the power he uses comes from. He told me that this power solely belongs to God, but is distributed to people through the spirits. For example, he told me that his power was given to him through *M'Makembo*'s spirit. *M'Makembo* was his ancestor who lived about 130 years ago. Therefore, the source of the mystical power is God, but He gives it to the people through the ancestral spirits or other spirits. This confirms John Mbiti's assertion that "This mystical power is ultimately from God, but in practice is inherent in, or comes from or through physical objects or spiritual beings." (Mbiti, 1969, p. 203).

The medicine man/diviner informed me that the incarnations they chant while attending to a client are addressed to the spirit world. Charms or herbs become effective through the concerned spirit or spirits. Mbiti (1969, p. 203) explains this process by his assertion that:

Access to this mystical power is hierarchical in the sense that God has the most and absolute control over it; the spirits and the living-dead have portions of it; and some human beings know how to tap, manipulate and use some of it.

Some human beings have the ability to manipulate this power for either the benefit of the community or conversely to harm the community. For instance, religious specialists manipulate the mystical power for the benefit of people while witches and sorcerers manipulate this force to harm people and their property. Mbiti (1969, p. 203) observes that each community experiences this power as helpful and therefore acceptable, or harmful and therefore evil. This explains why medicine men, diviners, rainmakers, priests and others are adored in the community while evil magicians, witches and sorcerers are abhorred. Therefore, while the mystical power is used by people with an evil eye, usually regarded as enemies of the community to hurt the people, it is at the same time employed by the good people and friends of the community for curative, productive and preventive reasons. It is for this purpose that the medicine men and diviners give people charms, amulets and other magical objects to wear, keep in their homesteads and fields, rub on their bodies, apply on their possessions, eat for protection and so on. In the next section we shall discuss the manifestations of mystical power as magic, witchcraft and sorcery and how people try by all means to eliminate those who practice them from the community.

Magic, Witchcraft and Sorcery in the modern African Society

The mystical power in its manifestation as evil magic, witchcraft and sorcery remains a big challenge in all African communities as they continue to greatly influence the socio-economic, political and religious life of the African people to date. Some brands of Christianity, especially the mainline churches following their mother Church (Missionary Church) have condemned these beliefs and practices arguing that they are archaic, unreal and non-existence, but interestingly many Africans have continued to hold firmly into them. For example, Ndunjo (2018) in his study of the Tharaka people argues that although the evangelical churches have been in Tharaka for more than seventy years and have managed to get many followers amounting to about 90 percent of the Tharaka people, they have not managed to convince the Atharaka Christian converts to abandon their traditional beliefs on the effects of magic, witchcraft and sorcery.

This is in spite of the fact that most of these churches preach against the belief and practice of these practices and urge their members to totally ignore them. He elucidates that the Tharaka people will basically agree to be followers of the Evangelical churches but they will continue to hold firmly to the belief in magic, witchcraft and sorcery. This is because they strongly believe that witches, evil magicians and sorcerers are the main cause of their miseries and are responsible for the retrogression of family, clan or community's progress in all ways.

Various reasons have been given for the success of the African Instituted churches as well as the new Christian religious movements in Africa (see Shorter & Njiru, 2001; Kagema & Maina, 2004), but I think that one of the main reasons behind the success of these religious groups in many parts of Africa is their persistent claim that they can deal with the problems of witchcraft, sorcery and evil magic which have continued to affect many Africans regardless of whether they are Christians, Muslims, civilized or educated. The new Christian religious movements and African Instituted Churches have exorcism as their central custom (Shorter & Njiru, 2001). For example, if you watch the services of the new religious movements televised in Kenya on Saturdays and Sundays, you will notice that a sizeable percentage of these services are taken by exorcism where pastors claims to deliver the victims from the power of evil spirit. Ideally, the evil spirit is the devil, but many of these exorcists are quick to state that they are delivering people from the effects witchcraft, sorcery and evil magic. This has made them win the hearts of many Africans who are already grappling with life hitches of marital breakdown, loneliness, sicknesses, barrenness, joblessness, poor harvest, and so on, which are attributed to witches, sorcerers and evil magicians. Failure by the traditional dominant mainline churches including the Roman Catholic Church, Anglican Church, Presbyterian Church, Methodist Church and others to address these challenges have led them to lose many of their members to the emerging religious movements which are viewed as more concerned and appealing (Kagema & Muguna, 2014). Where Africans will not go to for healing or deliverance from these new religious movements, they will seek the help of a traditional healer or diviner.

Therefore, to date the most disturbing element in African life is the fear of bad/evil magic, witchcraft and sorcery. Mbiti (1975, p.165) observes that these are some of the greatest enemies of the society. There is no African community which does not share this fear. The belief in the function and dangers of these forces is deeply rooted in African life to the extent that it is absolutely difficult to expunge it even in the midst of modern science and technology, education, or religions like Christianity and Islam.

Magic

The use of magic is applied in two ways, that is, 'good magic' and 'evil/bad magic' (Mbiti, 1969, p. 198). Magic refers to a ritual performance or activity that is thought to lead to the influencing of human or natural events by an external and interpersonal mystical power beyond the ordinary human sphere (Gehman, 1989). Thus, human beings cannot comprehend exactly how this power operates. The 'interpersonal mystical power' implies that human beings can be able to tap and manipulate this force for their benefit, and at the same time some people can use it to harm others. In this regard, good magic entails tapping and employing this force for the benefit of the society, while evil magic involves tapping and manipulating this power to harm other people and their property. It is because of the ability of human beings to tap and manipulate this power that makes James G. Frazer to define magic as the manipulation and use of interpersonal powers through ritual and ceremony (Frazer, 1890). Similarly, Idowu (1973) describes magic as 'an attempt on the part of man to tap and control the supernatural resources of the universe for his own benefit.

Gehman (1989, p .90) classifies magic into ‘white magic’ and ‘black magic’, where the former implies good magic which is used for the welfare of the community while the latter connotes the evil magic which is employed by witches, sorcerers and evil magicians to harm people and their property. Geoffrey Parrinder in his book, *Witchcraft: European and African*, argues that the belief concerning ‘white’ and ‘black ’magic is found in both among Africans and Europeans (Parrinder, 1958). This classification is however contestable as it may just be the continuation of the discriminatory idioms labeled against Africans by the Westerners, whereby black is associated with ‘darkness, and ‘evil’, while white signifies ‘success’, ‘goodness’, ‘light’, and so on. That Africans have been discriminated against by the Europeans and Americans on the mere basis of their skin colour is a stark reality. Mugambi (1989) avows that the Christian missionaries, anthropologists, explorers and other expatriates from Europe who came to Africa in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries on the sheer basis of the skin colour regarded Africans as inferior to them. They viewed themselves as the “civilized” races, while Africa was a “*Dark Continent*” whose hope lay on these Europeans who would civilize it. The understanding was that the ‘black’ people cannot help themselves and they have to rely on their ‘white’ brothers, whom in the Social Darwinist analysis were the first to evolve.

James George Frazer’s categorization of magic into *Homoeopathic* and *Contagious* magic is possibly more helpful in helping us understand the concept of magic in the African context. Homoeopathic magic works on the principle that like produces like, while contagious magic is based on the notion that things once joined must remain so and can affect one another (Frazer, 1890). Parrinder (1958) gives some illustrations from the African life to distinguish between these two types of magic. On the first one which emphasizes that ‘the like produces the like’, Parrinder (1958) gives an example of rain-making rites where water is spewed into the air to make rain fall by imitation, or clouds of smoke are made to rise to help the clouds gather around. On contagious magic, Parrinder (1958) gives an example of where harmful charms can be made of man’s waste hair, nails, clothing, sleeping-mat and so on. This explains why many Africans would rather burn their old clothes than leave them scatted all over. Practically speaking, the African understanding of magic is normally based on this classification by Frazer.

The use of good magic is generally accepted and adored in the society (Mbiti, 1969). As we have already noted, religious specialists including diviners, medicine men, rain makers and others tap, manipulate and employ mystical power positively for the welfare of the community. They are thus regarded as friends of the community and are highly respected and graciously welcomed in every family or homestead. Mbiti (1969, p. 198) observes that good magic is used in the treatment of diseases, in counteracting misfortunes, in warding off evil spirits and in diluting or destroying witchcraft. According to Gehman (1989, p. 90), good magic is primarily used for protection against the evil forces that are found everywhere. The use of charms, amulets, herbs, seeds, powder, skins, feathers, chanting of magical formula, cuts on the body and other magical practices that are used to protect people and their property from evil powers are all manifestations of good magic. Gehman (1989) continues to elucidate that these are given by the medicine man who by the virtue of what he does to the community remains the most respected personality. It is good magic that is used by the rain makers to bring rain by the rain makers and the diviners, seers and prophets use it to foretell the future.

Kenyatta (1938) denotes that good magic is used for the benefit of the community where it used for curing human and animal diseases and other magical purposes beneficial to the people. He also notes that there is magic which is destructive to the community. In this regard, he explicates that the magic used by the Gikuyu is classified into eleven categories namely:

- Charms or protective magic (*gethiito*)
- Hate or despising magic (*monuunga or robuuto*)
- Love magic (*monyenye or moreria*)
- Defensive magic (*kerigiti, keheenga*)
- Destructive magic, witchcraft (*orogi*)
- Healing magic (*kehonia, gethiito gia kuhura morimo*)
- Enticing and attracting magic (*rothuko*)
- Silencing and surprising magic (*ngiria, itwanda*)
- Fertilizing magic (*mothaiga wa onoru*)
- Wealth and agricultural magic (*mothaiga wa otonga*)
- Purifying magic (*makoora, mohoko or ndahekio*)

Kenyatta's assertion confirms Gehman (1989)'s argument that good magic is openly favored by society and used for man's benefit, but bad magic is secretly practiced without the approval of the society. This confirms Mbiti (1969)'s argument that evil magic involves the belief in and practice of tapping and using mystical powers to harm human beings and their property.

Witchcraft

The term 'witchcraft' is contentious with scholars from various backgrounds, especially sociologists, anthropologists and theologians not agreeing who a 'witch' really is. I however, adopt John Mbiti's definition of witchcraft as a term used more popularly and extensively to refer to all sorts of evil employment of mystical power, generally in secret fashion (Mbiti, 1969, p. 202). Gehman (1989) describes witchcraft as a power in the witch used consciously or unconsciously to bring evil upon another person. Thus, witches tap and manipulate mystical power to harm people and their property. Witches are regarded as the greatest enemies of society as they employ all sorts of malevolent ways to hurt people or their property. In most African communities, witches are killed, ostracized or their property burnt as a way of punishment. Today, however, due to unnecessary suspicion and lack of trust, many innocent lives, especially of older adults have been lost in the guise of eliminating witches from the communities. Magesa (1997, p. 165) avers that witchcraft is a generic term applied to an evil person considered to have more power than that of the average person. He agrees with Mbiti (1969) that witchcraft is a mysterious power that resides in human beings, permeating all areas of life, and is an ever-present reality in people's political, social, and economic organizations. It thus, affects both the communal and personal life of the African people.

Witchcraft is either inborn in a person, inherited or acquired through other ways such as buying (Mbiti, 1975). For example, the 'evil-eyed' people are born that way. These are the people who by just looking at a person can harm him or her even when they unwilling. These are the kind of

witches whom Okot p'Bitek informs that do evil things without noticing (p'Bitek, 1971). For example, a witch can involuntarily bewitch you even when he least expected. Mbiti (1975) supports this view by his assertion that for some, witchcraft is said to function without their being aware of it. I remember when we were small children our parents used to warn against greeting some people or even look at them. So whenever we met them as we went to school or Church, we would run away. This is a common practice in every African village.

Witchcraft is envired in secrecy and associated with despicable behaviour and revolting actions that break all social and accepted norms in the society. Some of these loathsome acts include handling excrement, urine, or vomit, moving around naked, especially at night, and engaging in sexual intercourse with spirits or animals. They commit incest and cause other people to do the same, or to have incestuous dreams. They reject kinship ties and may kill and eat the flesh of close relatives or others (Nyabwari & Kagema, 2014).

Witches use incarnations, words, rituals and magic objects to inflict harm on the people. To do this they use nails, hair, clothes, and other belongings of the targeted victim (Mbiti, 1975, p. 167). To harm the victim, the witch may burn, prick or even wish evil to the victim's belongings in the belief that by inflicting harm to what once belonged to a person, that person is automatically harmed (Mbiti, 1975). This is the rationale behind Africans not leaving their belongings such as books, clothes, bangles, necklaces etc, anywhere.

Witches also dig magic objects into the ground across the path where the intended victim is likely to pass, or at his gates or in his fields (Mbiti, 1975, p. 167). As they do this they utter some magical words, sometimes 'calling' the name of the intended victim. When the targeted victim passes by, he or she is automatically harmed. In most cases, it is only a medicine man or a diviner who can reverse the situation. In this regard, Africans are careful not to use the same route they had used and other times they have charms applied on their gates, fields or worn. The 'protective' and 'pacifying' magic described by Kenyatta (1938) works for this purpose.

In some cases some very 'powerful' witches send insects such as flies, bees, wasps; birds or animals to take harm to the victim so that when they touch him/her or he/she sees them he/she will fall sick and eventually die. The witch can also change into an insect, bird or animal which then goes attack the victim (Mbiti 1975). Africans will thus not take it normal when an animal such as python bites a person. The explanation is that the python has either been sent by a witch to harm the victim or it is the witch who has turned herself into a snake to cause harm to the person. Sometimes, the spirit of the witches leaves them at night and goes to the victim to cause harm to him (Mbiti, 1975, p.167). Nyabwari and Kagema (2014) inform that witches are people with an inherent power by means of which they can abandon their bodies at night to meet with others (witches) or to suck or eat away the life of their victims.

Given this, Magesa (1997, p. 170) argues that witches turn themselves into animals like hyenas, owls, leopards, lions or other nocturnal creatures or into spirit bodies to attend spirit assemblies or to accomplish their evil errands. Similarly, Van Wyk (2004) denotes that witches have the power to free their spirits from their bodies at night and to turn themselves into nocturnal animals like baboons, owls, lightening birds, and cats to harm their victims. Their craving for human

flesh makes them frequent graveyards. Sometimes, they are thought to eat or suck the life force or soul spirit of their victims.

This is true because when I served as the Hospital Chaplain, I came across a number of patients who confided to me that the spirits of some people very well known to them came to them at night telling them that they must die. Some of these patients died. These are issues that an African pastor has to grapple with to the detriment of his or her Christian faith, which has failed to offer a lasting solution to the grave effect of witchcraft in Africa.

There are also witches whom we termed as 'evil-eyed' who can cause harm by just looking at a person. Those who have evil intentions look at the victim as they wish him evil or speaking to him words intended to inflict harm on him or her (see Mbiti, 1975). There are some witches who have no intentions to harm a person but by just looking at him he is involuntarily harmed.

Magesa (1997, p. 168) observes that the power of the witchcraft is thought to reside in various organs of the body especially the blood, hair, liver. To him, in most cases, witches are not conscious of their power. Individuals who are unusually old, beautiful, ugly, red-eyed, sometimes physically deformed, excessively successful or extremely poor are often considered witches. These are people who exhibit extremes of character traits - the very rich, very poor, those who are very popular or surly. This is however a very selective belief and does not describe the true picture of a witch in many African communities. In fact, a witch may just be a very normal person by look, sometimes with no distinguishing marks or traits. Today, a witch may be an unsuspecting teacher, business person, politician, government officer, etc or worse a pastor.

As we have already noted, the African cosmology operates on an 'Occurance-Cause' basis which holds that everything that happens has a cause. In other words, things are the way they are because there is someone responsible. In this regard, if something good happens it is associated with sapient beings including God, divinities and other spirits. When something bad happens, then evil people including bad magicians, wizards, sorcerers and witches are responsible. Petrus and Bogopa (2007) aver that anything wrong or bad both in society and in the world originates in witchcraft. Therefore, illness, barrenness, hardship, early death, divorce, failure to make a profit in business, retrenchment, accidents, failure to get a suitor, and other misfortunes are as a result of a witch in the village as well as other evil individuals who tap and manipulate the mystical power for the sole purpose of harming people or their property. Mbiti (1969, p. 200) explains this much better by his assertion that African peoples feel and believe that all various ills, misfortunes, sicknesses, accidents, tragedies, sorrows, etc. which people encounter are caused by the use of mystical power in the hands of a witch, sorcerer or an evil magician.

Normally, witches operate in total secrecy. They do not want their evil deeds or plans to be noticed by anybody. Gehman (1989, p.109) says that the witch does his or her work in secret, usually at night. He/she walks at night usually very fast. He/she normally moves bodily and not merely in his/her spirit. Among the Ameru, the witches usually operate at night while naked. Gehman (1989, p.109) refers to a witch as an evil person who is anti-social and secretive, unwilling to divulge her knowledge or activities. With evil intentions he/she seeks to harm people, especially the prosperous ones. This explains why in some African communities, many

successful people, especially the educated ones run away from their villages to settle in urban areas.

Sorcery

The demarcation between witchcraft, sorcery and evil magic is very thin in many African communities. For example, among the Ameru, a *Murogi* is a term employed to any person who negatively employs mystical power to hurt others or even their property, whether a witch, evil magician or sorcerer. According to Parrinder (1954), there are some African communities who make a distinction between a witch and a sorcerer, but they are not many. Where such distinctions occur, their work differs, and they are very much feared (Parrinder, 1954, p. 117). This is true because Mbiti (1975) regards them as the greatest enemies of society.

Gehman (1989, p.94) defines sorcery as the use of black magic and medicines against others. To him, sorcery may be practiced by any individual who buys specially prepared charms and then places them near someone's house. The understanding here is that unlike the witch who has inherent power within herself as an individual, the sorcerer operates with the power within charms. As we have already said, witches are thought to have the power that makes them do extra ordinary things beyond human abilities. Usually, sorcerers do not have this innate power and have to rely on their paraphernalia for their evil deeds to succeed. Parrinder (1954) elucidates that the African name for the sorcerer and witch may be the same, but they are often distinguished as a "day-witch" (sorcerer) and "night-witch" (general witch). He says that the "day witch" or sorcerer is a conscious and deliberate evil doer who carefully plans on how to hurt his enemies. This is in contrast to a 'night witch' generally referred to as a witch who prefers to operate at night while people are asleep and can involuntarily harm people or their property.

Mbiti (1969, p. 200) avers that sorcery involves the use of poisonous ingredients, put into the food or drink of someone. According to Parrinder (1954, p.117), the sorcerer deliberately tries to harm his enemies, or those of clients who have paid him by magical means. Parrinder (1954) supports Mbiti (1969)'s argument that a sorcerer may use suggestive magic or true poison. He may put harmful ingredients into a cooking-pot or dunking gourd. He also may put magical preparations secretly in the victim's house or draw a line around his (victim) hut or compound using magical powder. Once the victim eats or drinks the poisonous food or liquor, he automatically falls sick and dies.

Sorcery is the most dangerous application of mystical power as once the victim consumes a poisonous thing, it is difficult for him or her to heal even with the help of a medicine man or diviner. Among the Mwimbi people of Meru, if a *Muntu Mugo* (medicine man) realizes that a person has been bewitched or cursed he quickly conducts the ritual of *Gutaika Mugiro* (vomiting the evil charms). This becomes tricky if the victim has eaten a poisonous ingredient. This explains why Mbiti (1969) rightly observes that sorcerers are the most feared and hated members of their communities.

Sorcery entails the anti-social employment of mystical power to hurt others (Mbiti, 1969, p. 200). It takes the form of spells, poisoning, or other physical injury done secretly by someone to someone else or his crops and animals (Mbiti, 1975, p. 167). Sorcerers employ all sorts of evil ways to harm people and their property (Mbiti, 1969). Mbiti (1969) and Parrinder (1954) inform that they send flies, snakes, leopards, lions and other animals to attack their enemies or carry diseases to them. Sometimes, they spit and direct the spittle with secret incantations to go and harm people or their belongings (Mbiti, 1969). It is possibly because of this that the Ameru tend to ask someone who likes spitting anywhere that, “Why are you spitting like a *Murogi* (sorcerer)? A sorcerer can also call down lighting to hit his victim. It is believed that some of them can rise to the sky and come down as lightning to harm the victim (Parrinder, 1954).

The other belief is that sorcerers dig up graves to remove human flesh or bones which they use in their evil practices (Mbiti, 1969, p.200). This is especially if the dead person is their victim. There are many stories in Africa that the remains of the dead have been removed from the graves and some of their body parts plucked off. This is believed to be the work of the sorcerers and people will by all means guard the graves of the departed ones. According to Parrinder (1954, p.118) sorcerers also use men as their evil agents, especially the dead which they raise from their graves. They open up the graves magically, and the body comes out. The sorcerer then drives a wooden splinter into the dead person’s head so that he becomes foolish. After that the sorcerer pierces the ‘raised’ person’s tongue with a bone to prevent him from speaking. Usually, the ‘raised’ person takes the form he had when alive. The sorcerer then sends the ‘raised’ person to attack his enemies or those of his clients (Parrinder, 1954).

According to Parrinder (1954, p. 118), there are some sorcerers who have ‘semi-human familiars’ that they control. Some of these are small hairy beings, others have one leg, some are mono-eyed, etc. and are also very cunning and mischievous and are known for stealing people’s children. In some other instances, the sorcerer can make a clay image of an evil spirit which he places outside the victim’s house or at the path where many people pass. The evil spirit is able to attack and harm the targeted enemy.

What we need to note about sorcerers as observed by Van Wyk (2004) is that they practice their evil by daytime, cannot leave their bodies, and do not kill or harm randomly. They kill or harm for a specific purpose. They are not like witches who can harm or kill even when they have no intention to do so and mainly like operating at night. While witches are mainly women, most of the sorcerers are men. Kagema and Nyabwari (2014) inform that unlike witches, a sorcerer can stop being one. It is a matter of just deciding that ‘I will not harm other people’ and then you stop being a sorcerer. A witch will normally not have this freedom as the mystical power he possesses is externally controlled by some external forces.

Church’s Response to Evil Magic, Witchcraft and Sorcery in Africa

The missionary Church regarded the African belief in mystical power in its manifestation as divination, magic, witchcraft and sorcery as a mere fantasy. The Christian missionaries urged the African converts to disregard such beliefs and treat them as inconsequential. The missionaries saw such beliefs as the extension of African paganism and primitivity. Kibicho

(1990) and Mugambi (1989) help us understand the way the westerners viewed Africans and their culture by their elucidation that the Europeans who had come to Africa as missionaries, explorers, traders, travelers and government agents were negative to the African cultural and religious heritage, and thus used such derogatory terms as 'primitive', 'heathen' "savage" and 'pagan' to refer to the African people. Sadly, this was the evangelization approach that was adopted by the Church in Africa when the missionaries left for their homeland.

I will give an illustration to demonstrate how the Europeans viewed Africans: One old church elder narrated to me how in the early 1950s, the government gave them a piece of land to construct a Church building. They were first to clear the bushy area before setting up a place for worship. In the thick bush they found a pot which was producing some smoke, horns, gourds and other things which they could not understand. They interpreted this to be witchcraft which had been hidden there by a certain witch. They stopped clearing the bush and went to inform their Church minister who was a missionary. The minister refuted everything they were saying and told them to go throw those things away, then clear the bush so that the church can be built. They all refused and the minister very infuriated decided to go and throw the 'witchcraft' away. He went and threw away the paraphernalia only for him to fall sick immediately. He was attacked by a sudden fever which made him experience breathing difficulties and the hands that had touched the 'witchcraft' were in great pain. They took him to Chogoria mission hospital as he cried hysterically. The medical personnel took various tests on him but could not find any disease. All the treatment he got could not cure him. At last, his African Christians advised him to seek the assistance of a traditional medicine man. After some resistance, the minister accepted and interestingly he got cured immediately.

Thus, the effect of magic, witchcraft and sorcery in Africa is real and indisputable. Witches, sorcerers and evil magicians are feared by everybody including Christians. There nothing in Africa without a cause. According to Mbiti (1969), African peoples whether traditionalists, Christians or Muslims feel and believe that all the various ills, misfortunes, sicknesses, accidents, tragedies, sorrows, dangers and other failures in life are caused by the use mystical power in the hands of a witch, sorcerer or an evil magician. Thus, the scientific explanation of things does not apply to Africans whether Christians, Muslims or educated. A few years ago, I tried in vain to convince a couple that had lost its first born son to HIV/AIDS that it was not their mother who was responsible for their son's death. Although they were educated and Christians they could not understand how HIV/AIDS could kill their son, unless such a disease has been sent by someone whom they suspected was their step-mother. This is the reality in every African village. As Mbiti (1969) avers, people will fear to leave around their hair, nails, clothes, and other belongings because their enemies can use them and work evil magic against them.

Following its mother Church (the missionary Church), the Church in Africa has preached against such beliefs but she has not succeeded. As affirmed by Idowu (1973), Africans who convert to Christianity remain superficial Christians while deeply rooted in their traditional religions. This is largely due to the Church's failure to deal with the effects evil magic, witchcraft and sorcery which continue to threaten the life of every African. I have heard many pastors complain that their members are Christians during the day but at night they visit traditional medicine men or

diviners. This fact is confirmed by Kagema and Nyabwari (2014) in their assertion that African Christians remain Christians as far as things are good but quickly shift their allegiance to African Traditional Religion when crisis looms. Mbiti (1969, p. 34) adds that Christians in Africa believe in witchcraft, sorcery and evil magic because Christianity seems not to meet their immediate social, religious, and cultural dilemmas. This is the reality we cannot escape from. The truth of the matter is that Christianity in its present form has failed to address the needs and aspirations of the African people. It has not been able to address the challenges that the African continent faces. The result of this has been that it has not made any meaningful impact in the lives of the Africans many of whom have opted to become superficial Christians. It is possibly this desperation that has made some African scholars suggest that Africa could have done better without new religions like Christianity, Islam and others. For example, Chipenda (1993) attests to the fact that those nations in which Christianity is declining and some in the orient where Christianity has never made a significant impact are the ones that are prosperous. He then goes on to ask a question worth reflection by all of us: "Must Africa abandon religion in order to prosper?"

Magesa (1997) avows that the belief in the effect of evil magic, witchcraft and sorcery is to date real in Africa. This belief permeates all areas of life and is an ever-present reality in people's political, social, and economic organizations. It affects both communal and personal life. In this regard, it is erroneous for the Church in Africa to treat such beliefs as irrelevant yet Africans whether Christians or Muslims strongly hold onto them. Rather than imagining that those Africans who convert to Christianity abandon such beliefs, it is the high time that the Church in Africa confronts them head on. This is because as we have already said Africans will get converted and promise to leave their old ways, but it will be difficult to erase the fear of evil magic, witchcraft and sorcery which they believe are the main cause of their life predicaments.

As I collected the material for this paper, I asked some Christians what they thought was the main solution to the challenge of evil magic, witchcraft and sorcery in Africa. Notably, the majority told me that they believe in the "power of prayer." Interestingly, when asked, Africans will say that they believe that prayers can cure one from the effects of evil magic, witchcraft and sorcery, but when they go back to their homes, they will seek the assistance of a diviner or medicine man if they suspect that something is wrong. You will see them in Televisions beings being prayed for by the New Christian religious movements' pastors many of whom claim to have powers over evil magic, witchcraft and sorcery, but if the prayers do not work, which is usually the case, they seek the help of a medicine man or diviner.

If the Church in Africa hopes to succeed in her evangelization, she has to respond to the challenge of the mystical power in its manifestation as magic, divination, witchcraft and sorcery. This is because as we have noted these are issues that affect all Africans whether Christians, Muslims, or educated. Christianity and western education have tried to erase the issues of mystical power from the minds of Africans but as we have noted it has proved difficult. At Gatundu in Kiambu County, I came across a diviner who is more trusted by the people than pastors and medical doctors. Every Sunday afternoon many people including Christians line up in his home for healing. Efforts by the Church to fight him have been fruitless as people believe that he can cure many diseases which scientific medicine and pastors' prayers have failed to heal.

Therefore, rather than treating evil magic, witchcraft and sorcery as fiction, it is the high time that the Church in Africa accepts these as real issues that all Africans grapple with and look for a way of addressing them. God in his graciousness has given us scientific medicine which He uses to cure us, He is an omnipresent healer who heals us when we approach Him through prayer, and He has still given us traditional medicine men/women and diviners whom he uses to restore our health. That God can use any of these methods is fact that should be accepted by the Church if she hopes to remain relevant to the African people.

2. CONCLUSION

The socio-economic, political and psychic atmosphere of the African people is surrounded by anxiety and fear of mystical power in its manifestation as divination, magic, witchcraft and sorcery. Everything that happens in Africa whether good or bad circulates around this mysterious power, which is believed to be the cause of all what human beings cannot explain. The Church in Africa, since her inception in the nineteenth century has done a remarkable job of evangelization, but her failure to deal with the challenge that comes with magic, witchcraft and sorcery has rendered it irrelevant among many Africans who will pretend to be serious and committed Christians during the day, but when darkness comes go back to their African religions which promise them deliverance from the horrendous effects of the mystical power.

In order to penetrate fully to the hearts of the Africans, the Church in Africa must re-evaluate her evangelization strategy. The continued condemnation of the African belief in mystical power has not helped the Church at all. Evangelization usually becomes irrelevant if the real issues affecting people are not considered. Thus, rather than standing at the periphery condemning African beliefs and practices, the Church should use them for her edification. In this regard, issues of magic, witchcraft and sorcery which are central in the lives of Africans become central tools of spreading the Gospel of Christ. The song that is sung in Kiswahili by Christians in Kenya that, “Yesu ni Mganga wa Waganga” (Jesus is the medicine man superseding all medicine men) should be made more practical than theoretical. As a medicine man above all other medicine men, Jesus cures people from all their illnesses even those brought about by witches, sorcerers or evil magicians.

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