

## **The Impact of Magic and Witchcraft in the Social, Economic, Political and Spiritual Life of African Communities**

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**Abstract:** *Most Africans believe that witchcraft cause unusual phenomenon like accidents, conflicts, death, domestic and public aggression, loss of poverty, sickness and failure. The mystical powers are controlled by witches who possess powers which stop or influence the aforementioned phenomena. Belief and practice of witchcraft as this paper discusses has negatively impacted the social, economic, political and spiritual development in African. The coming and establishment of Christianity in Africa seems not offer lasting solutions over the belief. Data reveals that some of those either suspected or caught in the practice are confessing Christians. Missionaries persuaded the Africans to join Christianity without first adequately teaching them the causes of mystical happenings like death, accidents, loss of poverty, sickness and failure. Because of the Africans generosity, they dropped their social, -religious and cultural practices to join Christianity with a hope of practicing faithful Christianity which they thought could address their heart demands. Because of inadequate teachings on causes and solutions to the aforementioned phenomena, the African Christians in spite of their commitment to Christianity feel insecure in their personal, physical, health and property safety. The study utilized the social change theory developed by Lauren Fitzpatrick (1976). Social change is defined as a social process whereby the values, attitudes, or institutions of society become modified*

**Keywords:** *witchcraft, mystical powers, development, Christianity*

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Witchcraft has been a primary symbol of evil all over the world. The perception people hold on witchcraft makes them fear, hate and wish to eliminate from society those suspected or accused of it. Hayes (1995: 339-354) observes that between 1994 and 1996 hundreds of people were killed in the Northern province of South Africa after being accused of witchcraft. Adding to this view, Holmes (1974:40-43) states that the existence of beliefs and practices of witchcraft and sorcery were witnessed in Britain a thousand years after the birth of Christ. The British authorities condemned these practices and persons who were accused of it were dismissed as social misfits. Akama and Kadenyi (2006) observe that belief and practice of witchcraft has significantly affected social, economic, political and spiritual developments of the Africans.

Any discussion on the twin themes of magic and witchcraft is shrouded in ignorance, prejudice and falsification. It is full of derogatory attitudes which belittles and despises the whole concept of mystical power (Mbiti, 1969:194). A second camp does treat the material seriously and notes the views, fears, uses, and manipulation of these mysterious phenomena. Mbiti adds that those who distort the ideas are either Europeans, or American popular writers, missionaries, or colonial administrators

Mystical power is known or experienced by nearly all Africans who have grown in a traditional environment. They will have witnessed magic, divination, witchcraft or other mysterious phenomena.

Belief in mysterious power is found throughout Africa. Indeed it is part and parcel of African traditional religion. It is a power that is real, distinct from hypnotism, conjuring tricks, obvious

cheating, manipulation of hidden means of communication or the result of psychological conditions. There is no African society which does not hold belief in mystical power of one type or another.

## **2. HOW MAGICAL POWER IS DISPLAYED IN AFRICA**

This may be expressed through words, especially from a senior to a junior in age, social status or position in the office. As an example, the words of a parent to children carry a lot of power, either for causing good fortune, curses, success, peace or sorrows. Mbiti adds that formal curses and blessings are extremely potent. People travel long distances to receive formal blessings, and conversely, they take extra care to avoid formal curses.

Mystical power may cause people to walk on fire, lie on thorns or nails, send curses or harm including death from a distance. Practitioners can also change into animals, spit on snakes and cause them to split open and die or stupefy thieves so that they are caught red-handed. They can convert inanimate objects into biologically active living creatures, or enable experts to delve deep to reveal hidden information, or reveal the future, or detect thieves and other culprits.

This is why they wear charms, take medicines or get them rubbed into their bodies. They use experts such as diviners, or medicine men, to counteract the evil effects of this power, or obtain power charged objects containing the same power. Some people pay fortunes to get this power. The power affects everyone, whether directly or indirectly, for good or for harm, by the beliefs and activities connected with this power.

On the positive side, mystical power is for curative, productive or preventive purposes. It is for this reason that Africans wear, carry or keep charms, amulets, and other objects on their bodies, in their fields or homesteads. Medicine men or diviners are the manufacturers, dealers, and distributors of these articles of medicine and power.

On the negative side, mystical power can eat away the health and souls of their victims, attack people, cause misfortune and make life uncomfortable. Practitioners of these mystical powers are witches, wizards, sorcerers, evil magicians, or people with an evil eye, employing their power for antisocial and harmful activities.

## **3. MAGIC, SORCERY AND WITCHCRAFT**

Good magic is accepted and esteemed, used mainly by specialists such as medicine men, diviners and rainmakers. These practitioners use their knowledge or tap into this power for the benefit of their community. Examples of beneficial use of magic power include, the treatment of diseases, counteracting misfortune, neutralizing or destroying evil power or witchcraft.

Mystical power may be transmitted through charms, amulets, medical portions, rags, feathers, figurines, special incantations, or cuttings on the body. This power can be used to protect homesteads, families, fields, cattle, and other property. The visible signs of usage of protection against evil magic include, a forked pole in the middle of a compound, a potsherd on the roof of a house, lines of ashes strewn across the gate or homestead, a horn sticking out of the ground, an old gourd on a tree, coils round the neck, waist, or wrist, hair shaved off except for a few locks while some may be knotted.

All of these visible signs are a pointer to people's belief in mystical power. Some of these powers are protective; others are intended to bring good health, fortune, and prosperity. The power of good is believed to be directly supplied by God or it may be given through the spirits, the living dead or form part of the invisible force of nature.

Some people spend a great deal of wealth and effort to obtain magical protection and prosperity. Among those who tap these magical powers for good or provide this protective gear are medicine men, diviners and rainmakers. They claim that their mystical power comes from God. They acquire this through prayer to God or through intermediary of the living dead and spirits. Spiritual power is usually channelled through physical means.

#### **4. EVIL MAGIC**

This involves belief in and or practice of tapping and using this power to harm human beings and their property. In such cases sorcery is at work. Belief here is largely based on fear suspicion, jealousy, ignorance or false accusation. Hair, nails, cloths, or other articles can be used by enemies to produce evil magic. Hair or nails may be burned or otherwise used in a harmful way. When used maliciously, such mystical power is termed black magic, evil magic or sorcery.

According to Mbiti (1969: 201 ) sorcery involves use of poisonous ingredients in the food or drink of the intended victim. Sorcery is clearly antisocial employment of mystical power. Sorcerers are greatly feared and hated. They can send flies, lions, snakes, or other animals to attack enemies or send diseases against them. They can do this by spitting or directing spittle with secret incantations to go and harm someone else. They may even dig up graves to remove human flesh or bone to increase their powers or use them to attack their targets. Others provoke spirits to attack or harm others.

Van Wyk (2004:1211) observes that sorcerers practice their evil by daytime, are mostly men, cannot leave their bodies, and do not kill or harm randomly. They kill or harm for a specific purpose. Unlike witches, a sorcerer can stop being one. However, both witches and sorcerers can perform natural magic or thaumaturgy (evil or black magic, casting spells, incantations)

Africans believe that all ills, misfortunes, sicknesses, accidents, tragedies, sorrows, dangers, unhappy mysteries, etc, are caused by mystical powers employed by sorcerers, witches or wizards. Accidents, cases of barrenness, misfortunes or other unpleasant experiences are considered mystical experiences of a deeply religious nature. Mbiti (1969:201) rightly observes that in the African worldview, nothing happens by chance. Everything is caused by some other person in a direct way or through mystical forces. Envious or malevolent individuals will be blamed for any misfortune, sickness, accidents or other forms of suffering. Women are often blamed for evil experiences.

Mbiti (1969:202) adds that the people employed to carry out evil schemes are sorcerers, evil magicians, witches, medicine men, or diviners. They are thought to send out flies, bats, or other animals, spirits, or magical objects. But they could employ other means- e.g. use of 'evil eye' and evil medicine in the path of victim, planting of magical objects in the home or fields of their victims. They could also send death from a distance, or change into animals in order to attack their victims. Equally they could place harmful medicine where victims are likely to come into contact with it. Since these evil objects could be dispersed everywhere, there is no place that can be completely safe – and the slightest misfortune is usually blamed on misuse of these mystical powers.

In order for people to be freed from these malevolent forces which are everywhere, they resort to protection from medicine men and diviners. The specialists provide charms, amulets, medicines, or other protective articles placed in secluded places in the house or in the fields etc. The protective gear may be visible or invisible, secret or open, and is characteristic of all traditional societies to help people secure a feeling of safety, protection and assurance.

Diviners and medicine men are employed to perform ritual cleansing of households or people who have been victims of malevolent attacks. Practitioners of evil magic were severely punished by their communities through stoning, beating, paying hefty fines, or death.

#### **Witchcraft**

Witches were 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. The stories of their mystical powers and exploits are difficult to substantiate. In a broad sense witchcraft describes all sorts of evil employment of mystical power generally in a secret fashion.

In African societies, the distinction between witchcraft, sorcery, evil magic, and 'evil eye' is quite thin and academic. In a more popular sense, the term witchcraft is used to designate the harmful employment of mystical power in all of its manifestations (Mbiti, 1969:202). Witchcraft in all of its appellations is part of the religious corpus of beliefs in African traditional religions. Briefly

stated: Africans are aware of a mystical power in the universe; this power ultimately comes from God but is inherent in or comes from or through physical objects or spiritual beings; the universe is dynamic, living and powerful. Access to this power is hierarchical- it issues from God through the spirits and living dead to some human beings; communities experience this power as useful and therefore helpful, acceptable or neutral, or harmful and evil.

According to Magesa (1997:165) witchcraft or *uchawi*, as it is known in Swahili, is a generic term applied to a malevolent witch, sorcerer or anyone considered to have more power than that of the average person. The sorcerer unlike the witch does not kill at random. The sorcerer harms for a specific end. He does not do so with the full knowledge of his evil intentions. As an individual working alone, the sorcerer can if he wills get out of sorcery. Magesa observes that this issue is a moral issue. Sorcery is more predictable than witchcraft and is thus more amenable to protection. There are protective medicines against sorcery.

Magesa agrees with Mbiti that witchcraft is a mysterious power that resides in human beings. That it 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. Witchcraft, Magesa (1997:167) adds, is intimately bound and influences law and the understanding of morality and ethics. As stated before, the African worldview holds that anything wrong or bad both in society and in the world originates in witchcraft. This is the case whether it is illness, hardship, or misfortune. Since witches are regarded as opponents to the natural order of harmonious community life, any inexplicable mishap or tragedy which defies natural or religious explanation is attributed to witchcraft (Petrus and Bogopa, 2007:4).

All human beings, Magesa (1997:167) claims, have the ability to tap this power, meaning that each human is a potential witch. This power is latent in the majority but can become active. There are no rites, ceremonies, incantations or invocations accompanying the practice. It is simply projected from the mind of the witch onto the target.

The power of the witchcraft is thought to reside in various organs of the body especially the blood, hair, liver (Magesa, 1997: 168). He adds that witches are not conscious of their power. Individuals who are unusually old, beautiful, or 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, the very poor, those who are very popular or surly.

Witchcraft is usually inherited but can also be bought or acquired. It is shrouded in secrecy and associated with loathsome behaviour and revolting actions that break all accepted norms of behaviour in society. Some of these loathsome acts include handling excrement, urine, or vomit, moving around naked, 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 flesh of close relatives or others.

Magesa (1997: 170) concurs with Mbiti that witches are able to turn themselves into animals like hyenas, owls, or other nocturnal creatures or into spirit bodies to attend spirit assemblies or to accomplish their evil errands. Similarly van Wyk (2004:1211) notes that witches have power to free their spirits from their bodies at night and to turn themselves into nocturnal animals like baboons, owls, lightning bird, and cats in order 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. People who are bewitched often have their bodies wasting away because of this activity. Witchcraft, Van Wyk (2004:1211) notes, is also associated with necrophagy and cannibalism. Like Magesa, he adds that witches may be unaware of their actions.

Van Wyk agrees with Magesa that witchcraft is inherited, and that witches often harbour desires that are contrary to African social values like helpfulness, solidarity. He also notes that witchcraft is a metaphor for the enigma of human evil.

Jomo Kenyatta in his book, *Facing Mt. Kenya* (1965; 271-272) shows magic to be extremely pervasive among the Agikuyu. Indeed it appears that magic is a way of life in this community. Some magic was for defensive purposes, some for enhancing economic activities like hunting, business and agriculture, and others for healing and health; some is used to increase

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attractiveness and enhance the love life, to acquire influence, and yet others for spiritual cleansing. Kenyatta lists 11 types of magic that covers nearly all aspects of social and economic life as follows:

1. Charms or protective magic (*githitu*)
2. Hate or despising magic, (*mununga* or *ruruto*)
3. Love magic (*munyenye* or *muriria*)
4. Defensive magic (*kirigiti* or *kihiinga*)
5. Destructive magic or witchcraft (*urogi* = poison)
6. Healing magic (*kihonia*, *githitogiakuhuuhamurimu*)
7. Enticing and attracting magic *ruthuko*
8. Silencing and surprising magic *ngiria*, *itwanda*
9. Wealth and agricultural magic (*muthaigawautonga*)
10. Purifying magic (*mukuura*, *muhoko*, *ndahikio*)
11. Fertilizing magic (*muthaigawaunoru*)

As an example the charm or *githito* was used by a majority of the Agikuyu as a symbol of security against numerous potential dangers in the life of the individual. Such charms could be manufactured for a group, especially for a family as when a father decides to protect his homestead. They could also be individually acquired by people involved in various specialized activities like hunting. Such a hunter would seek a charm to protect him from wild animals and enemies of all kinds. Kenyatta notes that there are two types of love magic. One type is that in which the magic acts on behalf of the seeker to help him acquire the love of many (*Mureria* or *munyenye*), the Casanova type of powers. The second type allows the seeker to secure the love of one (*muthaigawawendo* or love medicine). The preparation and administration of these types of magic was done by various specialists - the magician (*muthingawagithitu*), or medicine man (*mundumugo*) and may involve, objects like be stringed beads, cords, strings, roots, leaves or bark of trees, pieces of dead animals, claws of animals, potsherds etc. The process of preparing the *githitu* or installing it was elaborate and accompanied by ritual and incantation. The practice of destructive magic (*urogi*) or witchcraft was also quite rampant. This was not tolerated in the community and if a wizard (*murogi*) was caught red-handed, he was tried, and if found guilty, dry banana leaves were tied round his body which were then ignited to burn him to death (1965:288-289).

### 5. SIGNIFICANCE OF WITCHCRAFT AND SORCERY IN AFRICAN COMMUNITIES

Magesa holds that witchcraft has a central place in the moral structure of African religion. That witchcraft is the enemy of life- acting as it does against harmony, good order, neighbourliness or good company. It is antithetical to cooperation and sharing, propriety and equitableness, honesty and transparency. In other words witchcraft is against all that holds the community together- the solidarity and the unity of society, the fine balance between the living and the dead, order and survival in the universe. Witches are people who cannot control their impulses, who have insatiable desires and hatreds, are often unsociable, selfish or arrogant.

Good order requires that people act openly and in daylight, identify with kith and kin, who respect taboos, and behave in a normal and moral fashion. This helps to suppress negative emotions like envy, hatred, anger, lust etc. Fear of being labelled a witch is a powerful deterrent against immoral antisocial behaviour, thus enforcing conformity to societal morals and values. This is perhaps why strange people with abnormalities, sterility, or bodily deformities are often considered witches - red eyes, ugly feet, queer or malicious behaviour, and extreme success.

Witchcraft was not tolerated in any African society. Persons convicted of witchcraft faced grave consequences. Some communities speared them to death, others shot them with poisoned arrows, killed them by stoning them, beating them to death or strangling them, burning them alive, or banishment (Mbiti, 1969: 201; Magesa, 1997: 172; Kenyatta, 1965: 288-289). Magesa argues that African beliefs in witchcraft have a deep theological significance (a theodetical function), in that it attempts to answer the question why bad things happen in the world. Why one man is bitten by a snake and not another? Why it rains in one man's field and not in his neighbour's? Why do wicked people prosper? Etc. Belief in witchcraft is thus an attempt to explain the inexplicable and to control the uncontrollable.

Van Wyk (2004:1216) has attempted to relate witchcraft to 'original sin' due to the fact that it may be practiced unwittingly (overwhelming people like emotions of anger, hatred, lust, jealousy). The basis of this thinking is that there is no such a thing as coincidence in life. All events have a cause. Witchcraft is the way Africans explain the ultimate cause of things. A negative consequence of witchcraft is that someone -the witch- has to be blamed for causing the misfortune and whether rightly or falsely accused, this person's life is at stake.

## **6. PERCEIVED ADVANTAGES OF WITCHCRAFT IN AFRICA**

Witchcraft is a powerful deterrent against evil intentions like stealing, incest and murder. It also has an educational function in that it keeps the norms and values of society alive.

Witchcraft teaches a powerful lesson that non-conformity is dangerous. It thus acts as a strong force for social cohesion. What this says is that one should not depart from accepted norms, for any departure could bring isolation and eventual destruction, not only of the individual nonconformist, but also of society may ensue.

## **7. CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO WITCHCRAFT**

The Christian response to witchcraft and witchcraft accusations has varied at different periods and in different places. Hayes (1995:345) notes that in Africa, beliefs in witchcraft and its practices are found among those who claim to have adopted Christianity and even those inclined to their indigenous religion. This is because despite Africans accepting Christianity, they still believe that there is mystical power governing the universe. Mbiti (1969:34) adds that Christians in Africa believe in witchcraft because Christianity seems not to meet their immediate social, religious, and cultural dilemmas.

Africans regard witchcraft as the supposed power of a person to harm others by occult or supernatural means. A witch among the Africans as Akama (2006:17) observes does not choose to become a witch and the supposed harm does not necessarily arise from malice or intent. A sorcerer may use incantations, rituals and various substances in order to do harm while a witch does not. Most Africans believe that the power of witchcraft is mysterious, hidden and available to spirits and certain human beings who can manipulate it to their whims.

Like in most African communities, among the West Africans it is believed that someone becomes a witch in any of the three ways. First, is through inheritance, the Ga people in Ghana observed by Adegbola (1983: 317), believed that witchcraft is passed on from parents to their children. Children thus became witches without their knowledge although they wait its practice until they attain puberty. Second, the Africans believe that witchcraft as a substance can be picked or bought from specialized people. Finally, they believe that witchcraft can be adopted or bought from other communities. Families believed to own witchcrafts are feared to an extent that affects social relations. This in turn affects development of all forms.

The Bantu communities in Kenya and Tanzania hold a belief that the African knowledge of the power of magic helps them to find cause of misfortunes, troubles, detects thieves and those who harm others. They engage in magic with purpose of safeguarding life or to be feared so that property and personal property is protected. They also believe that the witchcraft power is resident in plants and animals and is manifested through spoken words or mediated through specialists. Belief and practice of witchcraft among the Abagusii of western Kenya for instance is similar to Gehman's (1990:82) explanation that belief in witchcraft is highly recognized by people in high

government offices, rich urban dwellers and highly educated people most of who are sometimes Christians.

Christianity was brought to Africa through the missionaries who were purposed to Christianize the people (Nyabwari, 2010:78-79). The Africans were loyal and accepted Christianity with its teachings. The missionary church established its mission stations in Africa with hopes that they would transform the lives of Africans. Those who accepted Christianity and were formally witches were asked to renounce their former beliefs and be fully committed to Christianity. Their artifacts were burnt and others destroyed as soon as one confessed and promised to follow the newly found religion. The church gained popularity in Africa and attracted all people to it. Most of those who remained in the church tried to fulfill their traditional beliefs and practices whenever they felt that Christianity was not addressing their social, religious and cultural demands.

The largest numbers of Africans according to this study belong to missionary churches which spearheaded preaching against witchcraft. Ironically, beliefs in witchcraft are widely embraced among the African Christians. Some of them keep human dry bones, snakes and birds in their rooftops in their houses with a view to retain powers in witchcraft. Others have charms in their clothes and marks on private parts of their bodies. These people nevertheless attend church services and others even participate in critical church activities. Despite spread of Christianity in Africa, many Christians still believe in the power of witchcraft. This is contrary to the Christian teachings offered in the churches.

## **8. WITCHCRAFT IN AFRICA**

Brantely (1978:20-28) and Green (2000:170-178) assert that witchcraft is one of the most potent and dreaded superstitions in Africa. Most Africans as these scholars argue believe witches can act to influence, intervene and alter the course of human life for good or ill. Africans accept witchcraft as a mode of explanation, of perception and interpretation of their problems, events, nature and reality even when reason and common sense suggest otherwise. They believe witches can cause poverty, diseases, accidents, business failures, famine, earthquake, infertility and childbirth difficulties.

Mazrui (1993:32-38) argues that most people in Africa attribute any extraordinary, mysterious or inexplicable event, manifestation or phenomenon to witchery and wizardry. In some African communities there is even a talk about positive and negative witchcraft. The belief is that positive witchcraft is used to do good-cure diseases or solve problems, and negative witchcraft is used to do evil.

Mbiti (1969:80-85) and Mbula (1975:60) observe that Africans believe witches and wizards are spirits but that they carry out their nefarious activities as human beings, animals or insects. The belief is that witches and wizards transform into humans, animals and insects to perpetrate their evil machinations. Ranger (1980:45) adds that in countries like Nigeria, Cameroon, Ghana, Malawi, Uganda, witches are identified mostly with women or infants. In Nigeria, all nocturnal insects and animals especially birds are suspected to be witches or wizards. In Gambia or Senegal, witches are associated with the bird (owl) and children are advised to kill it wherever they see it. Witches are believed to operate mainly in the night. They allegedly organize nocturnal meetings in the seas, oceans and forests where they feast on human blood, flesh or fetuses.

The general belief among African communities as Parkin (1970:23-26) and Tinga (1998:34-39) argue is that witches and wizards always convene to plan evil. They gather to plot how to inflict harm or undermine the progress of people especially their family members. As a result of this, Hinger (1998) states that throughout Africa witchcraft accusation in families is common. People blame their fathers, mothers, husbands, wives, children, uncles and aunties, grandfathers and grand mothers for any evil or misfortune that befalls them even the ones they caused for themselves.

Abungu (1975:21-28) observe that while witch hunting is a thing of the past in most parts of Europe and the entire western world, in Africa, it is still an ongoing activity. Witch attacks, persecution and killings still take place on the continent. Incidentally, most of the victims are women and children. Recently there have been several reported cases of witch attack and killing

in different parts of the continent. Nthamburi (1991:8-12) says that one of the most intriguing aspects of the belief in witchcraft is witch confession- the claim that witches and wizards sometimes openly admit to have indulged in occult activities. Believers in witchcraft often cite- and use- this as a justification for witch attack and persecution. For instance in 1998 in Lagos, Nigeria, Ranger (1978:39, 40) observe that a middle aged woman was stoned and later burnt to death after she allegedly confessed to have indulged in witchcraft activities. The woman reportedly confessed to have killed ten people including her own kids as well as being responsible for the repatriation of her brother from Europe.

Mbula (1975:34, 35) states that, in some cultures in Nigeria, witch confession is believed to be therapeutic. Among the Okpameri people in Southern Nigeria witch confession is believed to be curative. So those suffering prolonged and complicated ailments are urged to confess and be healed'. Also in Pentecostal churches as Nthamburi (1991:32) argues witch confession is perceived as a process of spiritual rebirth and recreation.

## **9. CONCLUSION**

It is not easy to draw a giving line between white magic which is beneficial and black magic which is antisocial. They observe that the African method of administering social order is intimately connected with the belief in witchcraft. Ndeti (1972) observes that the coming of the missionaries and Christianity in Africa has not successfully changed the practices and beliefs in witchcraft. Nthamburi (1991:43, 46) argues that Africans in their desire for education became adherent of Christianity to gain admission to mission schools. He opines that inwardly they neither accepted the Christian doctrine nor did they want to live up to Christian standards of morality, honesty and codes of behavior. They fail to account for the strong African affliction to their religious beliefs and practices even after acquiring missionary education and Christian teachings.

Tempels (1959:321, 22) asserts that Africans belief in the supreme value of life. They further observe that the African's central focus for existence is to acquire life, strength in life and protect his property. This prompted the action prevent misfortune. In traditional days and even in the era of Christianity prayer and rituals are made with a view of preventing life threatening happenings. Africans were asked by Christian missionaries to abandon magical practices which were described as being contrary to the will of God.

Forte (1960:21, 22) discusses broadly on witchcraft. He provides an elaborate distinction between witchcraft and religion. However, he does not differentiate the witchcraft practiced by various communities. Magic and witchcraft is based on people's belief systems. Forte fails to show how the beliefs and practices were affected by Christianity which this study will address. Africans feel and hate witches therefore take stern measures to curb their activities. Missionary churches and governments claim that their aim is to deliver Africans from the fear of witchcraft. Parrinder gives a list of the activities that both Christianity and most educated people think are counted or associated with witchcraft. He fails, to tell whether Christianity is adequate in dealing with the same in the eyes of Africans.

Mbiti (1969:67-68) focuses on two kinds of magical practitioners that is the medicine men whose worth is beneficial and sorcerer. He shows that a medicine man medicines powers and calling from the divine/ancestral spirit – calling is through dreams, visions or strong feelings. Mbiti does not indicate whether these two complement each other or not. Mutungi (1997:12) and Neivs (1979:98-102) discuss misconceptions surrounding witchcraft ills and beliefs. They show for instance that people ran away from their homes and work places for fear of getting bewitched.

Most Africans agree that one can acquire mysterious power from the spiritual world either to heal, protect or hurt others. It is not clear whether Christians also use these powers. Walligo et al (1986:34) discusses the relationship between culture and world view. For Walligo, culture is based on the people's worldview. It is the belief in witchcraft, curses, magic and the practice of consulting medicine people. Based on this view therefore, it is hard for some elements of culture to be changed by external influences such as Christianity.



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