

Religion and Magic

Christian Communion and the PGM

Defining religion and magic

The division between magic and religion appears to stem from the perceived legitimacy or illegitimacy of the practice. Questions such as who or what is being invoked, for what reasons and whether or not they could be considered a criminal act.

Sir James G. Frazer divided magic and religion based on characteristics, which can be summarised as:

1. Magic compels supernatural beings with a direct purpose, where religion has a much wider application, and does not compel supernatural beings to do the bidding of humans.
2. Magic depends on the power of the magician as the 'initiator and executor' (Versnel, 178) where religion puts man at the mercy of god.
3. Active vs passive: with man as the initiator and executor, it is the burden of the magician to follow the instructions and complete his ritual, whereas religious prayers can be modified by anyone to fit any situation, as long as the supplication is being made to the one god [of that particular religion].
4. Isolation vs community: magicians tend to be on the fringes of society, with comparatively no order or common goal in the community.

Christian Communion or Eucharist

- Eucharist from the Greek *'eucharista'* meaning thanksgiving.
- An act of remembrance “Eat and drink in remembrance that he died for you and feed on him in your hearts by faith with thanksgiving.”
- “Do this... in remembrance of me” (1 Corinthians 11:25).
- Requires that the steps be followed in order, led by a bishop in the first instance although contingencies exist.
- Differences across sects such as transubstantiation.

PGM XIII

- Spell to invoke the creator God, with specific uses and instruction at the end of the spell.
- References to the natural world ‘you of the four winds’
- References to astrological world ‘the seven sounds [of the planets which] utter their voices according to the twenty-eight forms of the moon’
- God is invoked through calling his ‘attention’.
- Specific instructions on how to use voice in the ritual (*pushing more, bellow-howling.*) *"Come to me, god of gods, GOBI BI IAO AE OIOTK"* (*Pd in, fill up, / shutting your eyes. Bellow as much as you can, then, sighing, give out [what air remains] in a hiss.*)

Similarities

- The form the God takes for those performing or taking part in the ritual
- ‘For you are I, and I, you’ (PGM) vs COE ‘We break this bread to share in the body of Christ. [All] Though we are many, we are one body, because we all share in one bread.’
- Focus on the oneness between the person and God, however the difference in pronoun ‘I’ vs ‘we’ is notable.
- COE: *‘Receive the body of our Lord Jesus Christ which he gave for you, and his blood which he shed for you. Eat and drink in remembrance that he died for you, and feed on him in your heart by faith with thanksgiving.’*
- PGM: *‘I have your name as a unique phylactery in my heart.’*

Differences

- Communal vs individual
- The act of remembrance, putting the person at the mercy of God to guide and bless their actions
- PGM is more active, invoking the God to give power directly to the person invoking him (I vs we)
- Magic hinges on the power of the magician as the *‘initiator and executor’* (Versnel, 178)
- *‘Durkheim was surely right in arguing that a main job of religion is to get individual emotions (the ordinary, everyday ones as well as the wilder ones) involved in ritual, ceremony, and prayer. **Thus does a collective representation arise.**’* (Anderson)

Debates on definitions

- Frazer's definitions of magic and religion give distinct differences to define whether a practice is religious or magical
- Ethnocentric approaches – are Western distinctions between magic and religion useful when examining non Western practices?
- How did distinctions exist in the Greco-Roman world? 'In sum, accusations of magic could function as a social and political weapon to diabolize and eliminate the opponent.' (Versnel, 183)

Conclusion

- Definitions of magic and religion hinging on their differences can prove problematic.
- The Christian communion and the PGM XIII spell call on the power of God, and consumption takes place.
- The Christian communion can be defined as religious because of its communal aspects, whereas PGM XIII appears to be a more individual ritual with a clear goal.
- However, the distinction also depends on social beliefs, of whether a ritual is helpful or comes at the detriment of the wider community.
- Legitimacy vs illegitimacy of the practice – is the act invoking a true, benevolent god or demons? Is the purpose legitimate e.g. divination vs remembrance, gain vs worship. Consider who has the power to define what is and what isn't legitimate practice.

**‘I think we all realize now that religion
and magic, and science too, all do
partake of the rational, the emotional,
and the social.’**