

## ***Magical Thinking and Religious Thinking***

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Although one would think that the development of science and technology promotes the elimination of magical practices and magical thinking, yet observation of contemporary culture seems to contradict this. Symptoms of magical approach to reality are becoming more noticeable: well-stocked esoteric bookshops, TV channels devoted to the subject in question, fortune-tellers' offices, authors writing about the return of magic<sup>1</sup>. The development of science and technology and at the same time the return to the practice of magic and magical thinking is only a seeming paradox.

Goethe once aptly wrote that aiming toward magic is the result of a specific contact of the human mind with science and technology. It is about an encounter that leads to disappointment, helplessness emerging from improperly set cognitive goals. In this way the belief is created that human reason is helpless, that it has been defeated, despite being able to develop and popularise science and technology. This attitude was adopted by Doctor Faust<sup>2</sup>:

*Ab! Now I've done Philosophy,*  
*I've finished Law and Medicine,*  
*And sadly even Theology:*  
*Taken fierce pains, from end to end.*  
*Now here I am, a fool for sure!*  
*No wiser than I was before:*  
*[...]*  
*And see that we can know - nothing!*  
*It almost sets my heart burning.*

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<sup>1</sup> M. INTROVIGNE, *Powrót magii*, Kraków 2005.

<sup>2</sup> See J. Goethe, *Faust*, translation *Poetryintranslation*. January 7 2012.  
<<http://www.poetryintranslation.com>>.

[...]  
*So I've given myself to Magic art,  
To see if, through Spirit powers and lips,  
I might have all secrets at my fingertips.*

[...]  
*Still have to speak what I cannot know:  
That I may understand whatever  
Binds the world's innermost core together,  
See all its workings, and its seeds,  
Deal no more in words' empty reeds.*

Magic provides a new way of understanding reality. It introduces a typical way of thinking, which is gradually beginning to cover different spheres of life. It is the religious sphere that becomes most susceptible to its influence. However, despite the fact that there has never been a clear distinction between religion and magic, transferring the analysis to the level of thinking enables a way out of this intellectual deadlock. Magical thinking and religious thinking are two qualitatively different processes which one can attempt to typologise. Distinguishing between magical thinking and religious thinking is important from a cognitive standpoint, since it allows to shed some light on all reality experienced, because our way of thinking constitutes the basis for our interpretation of the world.

This article is aimed at the search for distinguishing elements on the level of thinking between magic and religion. The order of the issues discussed will be as follows:

▲ firstly, the difficulties in distinguishing between magic and religion will be indicated,

▲ and secondly, having transferred the reflection to the level of thinking, thirteen features of magical thinking and religious thinking will be demonstrated.

### **Dilemmas of magic- religion relationship**

The mutual relationship between religion and magic can be looked into from four different perspectives. Some people emphasize total separation of religion and magic, and therefore favour the possibility of their distinction. Others point out that the notions of religion and magic cannot be so precisely defined, so that they can be effectively separated. There are those who suggest that although religion and magic are different, their closeness is caused by a common supernatural subject and the fact that they are both based on mythical tradition. Therefore, to distinguish religion from magic it is necessary to study their *modus operandi*. Magic is a practical art involving various ritual activities aimed at accomplishing a specific purpose and has a very limited technique and an extremely sim-

ple credo. Magic is an affirmation of human power, which allows you to evoke specific supernatural effects through specific magic formula and rite. And that is not characteristic of religion<sup>3</sup>. Finally, there are those who, like Kluckhohn, express the belief that anyone can create a definition that separates religion from magic, but no one has found the definition, which can be accepted by all students<sup>4</sup>.

An additional problem is that magical rites in many cases show a strong resemblance to religious rites. It is also difficult to precisely indicate the elements that are specific to religion or magic only<sup>5</sup>.

There have been attempts at model distinguishing of differences and similarities and the relationship existing between the reality of religion and magic<sup>6</sup>. Typologies of these phenomena, more or less detailed, comprehensive or partial can be found in older and newer studies, such as: Durkheim<sup>7</sup>, Malinowski<sup>8</sup>, Frazer<sup>9</sup>, Goode<sup>10</sup>, Klutz<sup>11</sup>, Conner<sup>12</sup>, Meyer<sup>13</sup>, Bohak<sup>14</sup>, Asirvatham, Pache, Watrous<sup>15</sup>, Kieckhefer<sup>16</sup>, Swienko<sup>17</sup>, Sieradzian<sup>18</sup>, Wypustek<sup>19</sup>, Pindel<sup>20</sup>.

The whole range of problems associated with separating magic from religion occurs in the analysis of so-called *Christian magical papyri*. Collected by K. Preisendanz in his work *Graecae Magicae Papyri*, and dating back to the first centuries of Christianity<sup>21</sup>, the papyri are the subject of

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. R. MARTIN HERNANDEZ, *El orfismo y la magia*, Madrid 2006, p. 31; B. MALINOWSKI, *Magia, Scienza e religione e Baloma; Gli spiriti dei morti nelle isole Trobriand*, Roma 1975, p. 92.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. A. KROEBER, *Anthropology Today*, Chicago 1953, p. 518.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. R. MARTIN HERNANDEZ, *El orfismo y la magia...*, pp. 56-61.

<sup>6</sup> An overview of various theories on the relation between magic and religion is presented in: R. MARTIN HERNANDEZ, *El orfismo y la magia...*, pp. 19-34.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. E. DURKHEIM, *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, Paris 1912.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. B. MALINOWSKI, *Magic, Science and Religion*, New York 1924.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. J. FRAZER, *Złota gałąź*, transl. H. Rzeczkowski, Warszawa 1962.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. W. GOODE, *Religia i magia*, transl. Jolanta Swolkień, [in:] *Socjologia religii*, red. F. Adamski, Kraków 2011, pp. 40-45.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. T. KLUTZ, *Magic in the Biblical World*, London 2003.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. R. CONNER, *Magic in the New Testament*, Oxford 2010.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. M. MEYER, *Ancient Christian Magic. Coptic Texts of Ritual Power*, New Jersey 1999.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. G. BOHAK, *Ancient Jewish Magic. A History*, Cambridge 2008.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. S. ASIRVATHAM, C. PACHE, J. WATROUS, *Between Magic and Religion. Interdisciplinary Studies in Ancient Mediterranean Religion and Society*, New York 2001.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. R. KIECKHEFER *Magic in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge 1989.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. H. SWIENKO, *Religia i religie*, Warszawa 1981.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. J. SIERADZIAN, *Jezus Magus. Pierwotne chrześcijaństwo w kręgu magii*, Kraków 2005.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. A. WYPUSTEK, *Magia antyczna*, Wrocław 2001.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. R. PINDEL, *Magia czy Ewangelia?*, Kraków 2003.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. K. PREISENDANZ, *Papyri Graecae Magicae. Die griechischen Zauberpapyri*, t. 2, München-Leipzig 2001, pp. 209-232.

scientific debate. They are hard to evaluate and evade any precise taxonomy. Some papyri have a form of prayer (invocation, requests) and do not contain any information on their use in an unusual way. Such is the text opening Preisendanz's collection<sup>22</sup>:

‘ Ο θεός ὁ παντοκράτωρ, ὁ ἅγιος, ὁ ἀληθινός, φιλόανθρωπος καὶ δημιουργός, ὁ πατήρ τοῦ κυρίου καὶ σωτήρ ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, φανέρωσόν μοι τὴν παρὰ σοὶ ἀλήθειαν· εἰ βούλη με ἀπελθεῖν εἰς Χιουτ, ἢ εὐρίσκω σὲ σὺν ἐμοὶ πράττοντα καὶ εὐμενῆ; γένοιτο, ἀμήν.

Almighty God, Holy, true, a Friend of man and the Creator, Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, reveal the truth to me, which is in You: do you want me to go to Chiut, will I find You cooperating with me and gracious? So be it. Amen.

In the analysed text, it is difficult to point out any element of magic. The papyrus contains a prayer for the discernment of God's will. Its form contradicts the idea of magic, as the request to God is combined here with the desire to submit to His will. The papyrus can be considered magical only conditionally, assuming that the owner treated it as magical.

Preisendanz's collection contains the entire group of papyri of a similar nature, which from the formal point of view would be an expression of religious thought, however, written records of them being worn by people, allow to interpret these texts as a manifestation of magical thinking. The charm of the seventh century is a perfect illustration in this regard<sup>23</sup>:

Δόξα τῷ πατρὶ καὶ τῷ υἱῷ καὶ τῷ ἁγίῳ πνεύματι νῦν καὶ ἀεὶ καὶ εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων. τὸν υἱὸν μονογενῆ περιβέβλημαι· φύγη ἅπ' ἐμοῦ, πᾶν κακόν, πᾶν πονηρόν, τὸ αἷμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ, φεῖσαι τῷ φοροῦντι.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. I clothed myself in the only-begotten Son. May every misfortune, every evil go away from me. Blood of Christ, have mercy on him, who wears it.

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* p. 209. The papyrus is abbreviated as P 1.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* p. 214. In addition to the papyrus P 5d quoted, mentions of wearing papyri are also made in papyri abbreviated as: P 10, P 15b, P 18. Cf. M. GILSKI, *Chrześcijańskie papirusy magiczne*, *Polonia Sacra* 27 (2010), p. 94.

All this makes the topical, objective factor to seem insufficient in precise indication of the criterion of demarcation between religion and magic. Therefore, a need arises to seek other criteria allowing us to make this distinction. In this article, we have made such an attempt. But unlike other authors, in the typology we have primarily focused on the issue of human thinking and its functions. It is thinking and its specific nature that determines whether a practice which we perform may be classified as religious or magical.

Richards wrote that thinking is a specific process in the course of which we organise our experiences by assigning them to different categories<sup>24</sup>. It is a relevant and important observation. The proposals included in the article have been synthetically collected and divided into 13 categories.

### **Magical thinking and religious thinking – an attempt at typology**

To begin with, it needs to be made clear that religious thinking is not characteristic of religion only (those functioning in the sphere of religion), and magical thinking is not characteristic of magic only (those functioning in the sphere of magic). Both types of thinking can manifest itself both in religious people and in those who perform magical practices. Therefore, you can indicate religious people behind whose practices there is a magical way of thinking, as well as people engaged in magic, for whom dimensions of religious thinking are present. The focus is on formal, not material side of thinking. Specific, formal characteristics of religious and magical thinking featured in the article will help to clarify this issue.

### **Features of Magical Thinking Religious Thinking**

#### **1. Thinking in the perspective of time and eternity**

Magical thinking occupies an earthly perspective, it is always focused on temporary, specific purpose. It is about an immediate effect. The level of magical thinking is "here" and "now". This type of thinking is associated with one specific issue, other issues are irrelevant. Magical thinking is always practical, utilitarian.	Religious thinking takes into account a long-term perspective, and future consequences of decisions taken today. This type of thinking takes into account an eschatological perspective, takes into account the will of God, and that is why even a concrete, immediate goal is always seen in the perspective of eternity. Gestures, rituals may exist for their own sake, can be selfless.
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#### **2. Thinking in terms of relationship with the group leader**

Magical thinking takes into account the relationship of service (between a professional and a customer). It does not	Religious thinking creates an interpersonal bond (the shepherd - his followers, the prophet -people). It is closely associated
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<sup>24</sup> Cf. I. RICHARDS, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, London 1936, p. 30.

<p>matter "who", it is "what" that is important. Thus, magical thinking is about finding a professional, a specialist, who is able to accomplish the task presented to them. Magical thinking does not create interpersonal relations, does not create lasting relationships.</p>	<p>with a sense of responsibility for others, with building permanent reference. It is open to search for deep interpersonal relationships. Religious thinking is oriented towards meeting with others in order to build a relationship based on trust, which comes from a thorough understanding of others.</p>
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### **3. Thinking in the perspective in terms of determinism and autonomy of God's actions<sup>25</sup>**

<p>Magical thinking presupposes the subordination of God's actions (magic spell forces his action). Magical thinking is about finding such words and formulas, to which God (deity) is helpless and has to perform a specific task. This type of thinking sees deity as a tool obedient to those who know its secret. Deity is thus not something autonomous, self-governing, but is obedient to those who have learnt its secret.</p>	<p>Religious thinking assumes God's autonomy (man is subordinate to God). This type of thinking does not lay claim to impose one's will to God, but it is open to search for the will of God, discover it, in order to follow it. Religious thinking is full of respect for God and for His freedom.</p>
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### **4. Thinking in terms of effectiveness**

<p>Magical thinking is focused on the effectiveness of efforts, in which the central role is played by precision in saying incantations or performing ritual (clearly defined formulas and spells). This type of thinking pays particular attention to the inherent power of the word and rite. The power is at the disposal of those who are acquainted with it. It is, therefore, mainly about challenging the notion of thinking as such and giving priority to precise repetition.</p>	<p>Religious thinking is characterised by hope that prayers will be answered, request's effectiveness depends on God's free will (request, prayer). Therefore, it is oriented toward deepening communication with God. Relationship with God is a relation open to His solutions, His ideas, His will, and it is not limited only to human proposals on how to resolve the matter.</p>
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<sup>25</sup> Thinking in the perspective of determinism and autonomy of God's actions can come up against cognitive difficulty in relation to the sacraments of the Church. In the sacraments, based on a ritual conducted by a priest God realises what the sacrament signifies. It may therefore seem that God is limited in His autonomy and follows man's orders. If it was the case, celebrating the sacraments would be an act of magic. It is not the case, because it is not man but God who is the administrator of the sacraments. During their celebration the priest acts - in persona Christi, and thus not man but Christ is the one who initiates the sacramental action. The priest celebrating sacramental acts does not coerce God's action; therefore it cannot be described as magic activity.

### **5. Thinking in terms of knowledge and belief**

<p>Magical thinking is focused on knowledge (skill, technique). There is no room for faith and trust. It is about certainties, acquisition of appropriate skills. In this sense, it is imitative in nature. It is based on accurate memorisation. Magical thinking is an attempt at detecting and explaining the mechanisms occurring in nature, the causes for each effect.</p>	<p>Religious thinking allows for faith (trust, hope, uncertainty). This kind of thinking is based on trust in God. Although characterised by a large degree of uncertainty, it is dominated by the prospect of hope arising from trust in God.</p>
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### **6. Thinking in the individualistic and social perspective**

<p>Magical thinking is individualistic (antisocial attitude, without structure, individualism). This type of thinking leads to atomisation and isolation of individuals, because it takes into account only individual perspective. It is not open to creating ties with others.</p>	<p>Religious thinking is pro-social (creating structures, acting in community, the sanctification and salvation in the community). Such thinking is not limited to seeking one's own happiness only, but it encompasses the prospect of caring for other people. Therefore, it leads to the formation of communities.</p>
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### **7. Thinking in terms of quality of human actions**

<p>Magical thinking focuses on external activities (rite, objects). It lacks deepening of the inner life. It does not create favourable conditions for reflection or any inner effort. It is therefore one-sidedly oriented and devoid of harmony.</p>	<p>Religious thinking involves the inner life of man (spirituality, morality, maturity). It leads to harmonious development of man's integrity. It affects not only the external behaviour of man, but also his spirituality; it is transferred to all areas of life.</p>
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### **8. Thinking in terms of objects used in religion**

<p>Magical thinking sees objects as the source of power (the power inherent in amulets guarantees effectiveness). This type of thinking is totally reistic. It is object-oriented, rather than subject-oriented. It directs man to search for purely material things, because they are means of conveying power.</p>	<p>Religious thinking sees symbols in objects that do not have any inherent power (wearing a medallion is a testimony of faith, it does not provide protection). This type of thinking sees the source of power in God. Objects are merely a symbol, are a testimony of faith and cannot protect man from misfortune. It is therefore focused more on the subject than the objects.</p>
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### **9. Thinking in the perspective of morality**

<p>In magical thinking observing moral principles by the customer is irrelevant (the privacy of living). It suggests that</p>	<p>Religious thinking takes into account the importance of observing religious principles and moral norms (The Ten</p>
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<p>ethical dimension is redundant in human life. In this sense, magical thinking is destructive, depriving man of motivation to shape his life according to moral principles. It does not lead to integral human development.</p>	<p>Commandments). It is open to seeking God's will, is aimed at following His recommendations in life. Religious thinking is therefore closely linked with the question of faithfulness to God.</p>
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**10. Religiosity and magic versus variability and stability of thinking**

<p>Magical thinking is characterised by automatism, stability (magic is not about spiritual conversion). Focus on automatism and purely technical aspect leads to typically imitative attitude. A magician's customer is passive. They are not characterised by intellectual exploration, but are only concerned about accurate imitation. They do not understand the processes governing magical operation of items.</p>	<p>Religion calls for metanoia (a real conversion is a change in the way of thinking). Religious perspective is a perspective of continuous reflection on thinking as such, in order to improve it, to discover new areas, new dimensions in it. In this sense, religious thinking is also meta-thinking.</p>
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**11. Thinking in the perspective of creating culture**

<p>Magical thinking does not take into account the culture-forming perspective (texts, figures, drawings on a small scale). Although magic is object-oriented, which could imply its culture-forming character and should encourage creativity, its focus on secrecy and privacy makes it boil down to creating small objects, easy to wear and conceal.</p>	<p>Religious thinking creates culture (architecture, art, music, principles of social life). It is open not only to harmonious development of man, his relationships with others, but also manifests itself in various forms of faith expression. Religious thinking tries to express faith in the language of culture and in this sense leads to harmonising the various spheres of life with faith.</p>
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**12. Thinking in the perspective of an explicit system of beliefs and rules of behaviour**

<p>Magical thinking rejects the system of articles of faith and values, or it accepts only a simple credo (none or a simple credo). Therefore it does not favour the development of systemic thinking. In fact, it can only be about single, unrelated truths.</p>	<p>Religious thinking accepts the system of articles of faith and values (the articles of faith, the commandments). It does not reduce religion to formal matters, but taking into account material aspects leads to creation of religious outlook on life, a coherent system of faith. This means, therefore, the ability of systemic, coherent, logical thinking.</p>
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**13. Thinking in the perspective of transparency and social legitimacy**

<p>Magical thinking is characterised by</p>	<p>Religious thinking creates religious</p>
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secretiveness and mystery (magic in societies is often illegal, just as mystery religions). It impedes social dialogue and makes critical reflection impossible. Therefore, thinking of this type encourages fraud, since it is not subject to verification. Secretiveness and mystery of magic hampers its legalisation, because it is hard to monitor processes of magical character.	communities and it is open to them, rituals are held in public (the legality of religion). This type of thinking is characterised by the courage to submit to public scrutiny. It does not confine the rituals to the private sphere, but integrates people around religion, which does not fear public verification of its authenticity, and therefore is subject to critical social assessment.
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It is difficult to pinpoint the elements unique to religion, or magic. This makes the objective agent in question seem insufficient for precise indication of the criterion of demarcation between religion and magic. Therefore, there arises a need to look for other criteria to distinguish between the two. Thinking as a subjective and relational category seems to present a possibility to overcome this difficulty.

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