

In the New Testament there are several testimonies to the rejection of magical practices that were in use in the Greco-Roman world and in Judaism.¹ If it is correct to date most of the New Testament writings to the second half of the first century CE, the present contribution will investigate the attitude towards magic in Christianity subsequent to the New Testament period, i.e., from the second to the sixth century CE. Except for one reference to a Valentinian testimony we will focus on “mainstream” Christianity; we will see that according to Church leaders Christians were generally forbidden to be involved in magic and sorcery. However, one might say that to some extent the mainstream Christian rites and customs can have a “magic” ring as well. Special attention will be paid to the views of Origen of Alexandria, since he wrote extensively on the relationship between magic and Christianity.

I. REJECTION OF MAGIC

The *Didache* (ca 100 CE) puts it quite simply when it says, “do not practice magic, do not use enchanted potions” (*ou mageuseis, ou pharmakeuseis*).² In this early book of Christian instruction idolatries, feats of magic, and sorceries (*eidôlolatriai, mageiai, pharmakeiai*) are classed under “the path of death”.³ Similar admonitions occur in the epistle of (pseudo-)Barnabas, of the early second century.⁴ In the first half of the second century the Shepherd of Hermas says to the Church leaders, “Do not be like the sorcerers (*pharmakoi*). For the sorcerers carry their potions (*pharmaka*) in boxes, but you carry your potion (*pharmakon*) and poison in the heart.”⁵ Although this admonition to Church leaders does not concern magical practices in a literal sense, it clearly reveals the absolute rejection of sorcery.

Bishop Ignatius of Antioch (early second century) wrote a poetic passage about the powerful effect of the star that announced Christ’s birth (cf. Matthew 2:2-10) and that surpassed all other stars:

Hence all magic was vanquished and every bondage of evil came to nought. Ignorance was destroyed and the ancient realm was brought to ruin, when God became manifest in a human way, for the newness of eternal life.⁶

Theodotus, a Valentinian Gnostic from the second half of the second century, agreed that Christ’s coming brought about a fundamental change in the influence ascribed to the stars. He thinks that until baptism a human life depends on fate (*heimarmenê*), but after baptism the predictions of the astrologists are not true anymore.⁷ This means that according to Theodotus the stars do not have any influence on a baptized Christian.

In the beginning of the third century Tertullian of Carthage’s interpretation of the Gospel story of the Magi (Matthew 2) reads that their worship of the newborn Jesus implied the end of their astrological practices. Tertullian considers astrology a sort of magic. He acknowledges that astrology was admitted until the coming of the Gospel, but he judges that Chris-

¹ See, e.g., Acts 8:9-24; 13:6-12; 16:16-18; 19:13-20; Gal. 5:20; Rev. 9:21; 21:8; 22:15.

² *Didache* 2:2 (ed. and transl. B.D. Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers I* [LCL 24], Cambridge MA / London UK, Harvard University Press, 2003, 418-419).

³ *Didache* 5:1.

⁴ *Barnabas* 20:1 (ed. and transl. B.D. Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers II* [LCL 25], Cambridge MA / London UK, Harvard University Press, 2003, 80-81).

⁵ Hermas, *Visions* 17:7 (= III.9,7; ed. and transl. Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers II*, 218-219).

⁶ Ignatius, *Ephesians* 19,3 (ed. and transl. Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers I*, 238-239).

⁷ In Clement of Alexandria, *Excerpts from Theodotus* 78,1 (SC 23, 200-203).

tians are not allowed to practice or consult it anymore. According to Tertullian, the same interdiction applies to practices of interpreters of dreams, Chaldeans, enchanters, diviners, and magicians (“aut sophistas aut Chaldaeos aut incantatores aut coniectores aut magos”).⁸ A similar view is given by Origen of Alexandria in his apology (from ca 248 CE) against Celsus’ criticism of the Christian religion. Origen says,

Magicians (*magoi*) are in communion with demons and by their formulas invoke them for the ends which they desire; and they succeed in these practices so long as nothing more divine and potent than the demons and the spell that invokes them appears or is pronounced. But if anything more divine were to appear, the powers of the demons would be destroyed, since they would be unable to withstand the light of the divine power.⁹

Origen supposes that this divine light appeared in the night of Jesus’ birth, when a heavenly host started to praise God (Luke 2:13-14), so that the demons lost their strength and their sorcery (here he uses the more negative term *goêteia*) was confuted.¹⁰

The *Apostolic Tradition* traditionally ascribed to Hippolytus of Rome (probably from the early third century) prescribes that a magician (*magos*) cannot be admitted to baptismal instruction;¹¹ subsequently it says, “A charmer or an astrologer or an interpreter of dreams or a mountebank or a maker of amulets, let them desist or let them be rejected.”¹²

In this vein there are many more texts of Church Fathers that testify to their negative view of magic and sorcery. To conclude this section, we will give one more example. Augustine of Hippo says in a sermon on the Ten Commandments (late fourth or early fifth century CE) that believers should not consult astrologists, soothsayers, and augurs, and that they should not get involved into pagan rites.¹³ In early “catholic”, patristic Christianity this was the common view. The Christian leaders were of the opinion that magic practices put people in contact with pagan gods or demons, so that Christians should keep aloof from it.

II. MAGIC IN EARLY MAINSTREAM CHRISTIANITY?

Yet it is remarkable that in spite of the ban on magic and sorcery Christians also had customs and rites that were similar to pagan magic, but that were not forbidden because they had a Christian content. In such cases the Christians did not speak of magic or sorcery, but from a distance one might say that their view of life had something magic. Of course, “magic” is not used now in the negative, diabolical sense that Christians attached to this word, but in a more neutral sense of a supernatural rite to which a powerful, miraculous effect was ascribed.¹⁴ Sometimes Christians did not even hesitate to use the same term as their pagan contemporaries, as the following example will demonstrate.

III. A “MAGIC” VIEW OF THE EUCHARIST AND BAPTISM

A word that Christians used in a positive sense, whereas for them it had a negative sound in a pagan context, can be found in Ignatius of Antioch’s *Epistle to the Ephesians*. In section I. we

⁸ Tertullian, *De Idolatria* 9,3-8 (CCSL 2, 1108-1109).

⁹ Origen, *Contra Celsum* I,60 (ed. SC 132, 238-239; transl. slightly adapted from H. Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum*, Cambridge etc., Cambridge University Press, 1980 [reprint], 54).

¹⁰ *Contra Celsum* I,60 (SC 132, 238-239).

¹¹ *Apostolic Tradition* 16,21 (transl. G. Dix, *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition of St Hippolytus of Rome*, London, SPCK, 1968 [new edition], 27; § 41,13 in W. Till. J. Leipoldt, *Der Koptische Text der Kirchenordnung Hippolyts* [TU V,58], Berlin, Akademie-Verlag, 1954, 12-13).

¹² *Apostolic Tradition* 16,22 (transl. Dix, *Apostolic Tradition*, 27; § 41,14 in Till, Leipoldt, *Kirchenordnung*, 12-13).

¹³ Augustine, *Sermones* 9 (PL 38, 76; 88).

¹⁴ For this approach to magic within Christianity, cf. M. Wallraff, “Magie IV. Kirchengeschichtlich, 1. Alte Kirche und Mittelalter”, in: *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* 5, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2002, 669-671.

quoted his words about the effect of the star that announced Christ's birth in that it brought to nought all magic. Immediately after this passage Ignatius calls the bread of the eucharist "a medicine that brings immortality (*pharmakon athanasias*), an antidote that allows us not to die but to live at all times in Jesus Christ."¹⁵ It is striking that the Apocalypse of John 9:21 uses this term for medicine, *pharmakon*, in the plural in the negative sense of "sorceries".¹⁶ Paul, too, warns against *pharmakeia*, sorcery, and so does the Didache (*ou pharmakeuseis*).¹⁷ In the case of a Christian usage of *pharmakon* it is customary to translate it positively as "medicine", and this seems correct, for it is true that in another context a word can have another meaning.¹⁸ Nevertheless, it is quite relevant that Ignatius calls the bread of the eucharist a medicine that brings immortality. This does not testify to a meagre symbolic view of the bread of the Lord's Supper that may sometimes be found in liberal present-day Protestant Churches. For Ignatius this bread had a powerful effect, since it made the believer live in communion with Jesus Christ for ever, even after death. Even though it is not necessary to call this a magic conception of the eucharist, we can still hear that this view has a magic ring. Moreover, Ignatius was not the only Christian who used the term *pharmakon* in a positive sense. At the end of the second century Clement of Alexandria also used it as a reference to the forgiveness of sins that was granted in baptism.¹⁹ In the *Acts of Thomas* (third century) it denotes the eucharist.²⁰ In the middle of the fourth century Bishop Serapion of Thmuis in Egypt used to pray that the bread of the eucharist might be for all who communicate "a medicine (*pharmakon*) of life for the healing of every sickness and for the strengthening of all advancement and virtue."²¹ Similarly, the *Apostolic Tradition* says that the person who communicates with faith cannot be hurt even though something deadly were given him.²² Since Christians ascribed a special power to the eucharistic bread it was sometimes taken home, apparently for the purpose of protection and in order to consume it at a later moment.²³ Even though this custom was also forbidden – thus the Council of Saragossa in 380 CE²⁴ – we can still conclude that the eucharist was considered a powerful rite that protected the baptized person against physical and spiritual diseases, against threats and against eternal death.

IV. AMULETS

Another example of a magic view of material objects comes to light in Christian amulets (*phylaktêria*). Numerous sources teach us that Christians often had amulets with biblical texts on them. Popular texts were, e.g., the first lines of the four canonical Gospels, a text about Jesus' proclamation of the gospel of God's kingdom, his healings and exorcisms (Matthew

¹⁵ Ignatius, *Ephesians* 20,2 (ed. and transl. Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers* I, 240-241).

¹⁶ Thus the New American Standard Bible and the New Revised Standard Version.

¹⁷ Paul, Galatians 5:20; *Didache* 2:2.

¹⁸ See L. Wehr, *Arznei der Unsterblichkeit. Die Eucharistie bei Ignatius von Antiochien und im Johannes-evangelium* (NTA NF 18), Münster, Aschendorf, 1987, 106-111, for the medical meaning of *pharmakon*.

¹⁹ Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus* I,29,5 (SC 70, 166-167).

²⁰ *Acts of Thomas* 135 (ed. M. Bonnet, *Acta Philippi et Acta Thomae accedunt Acta Barnabae* [Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha II,2], Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1959 [reprint], 242).

²¹ Serapion, *Euchologion* 13,15 (ed. F.X. Funk, *Didascalia et Constitutiones Apostolorum* II, Paderborn, Schoeningh, 1905, 176; transl. J. Wordsworth, *Bishop Sarapion's Prayer-Book*, Hamden, Connecticut, Archon Books, 1964² [reprint], 63).

²² *Apostolic Tradition* 32,1 (transl. Dix, *Apostolic Tradition*, 58; § 58,2 in Till, Leipoldt, *Kirchenordnung*, 32-33).

²³ This can be derived from *Apostolic Tradition* 32,2: "And let all take care that no unbaptised person taste of the eucharist nor a mouse or other animal, and that none of it at all fall and be lost. For it is the Body of Christ to be eaten by them that believe and not to be thought lightly of"; transl. Dix, 59, who put the following heading over this prescription: "Care for the Reserved Sacrament". § 59 in Till, Leipoldt, *Kirchenordnung*, 32-33.

²⁴ C. Kirch, *Enchiridion fontium historiae ecclesiasticae antiquae*, Freiburg i.B., Herder, 1914³, 351 (3rd canon): "Eucharistiae gratiam si quis probatur acceptam in ecclesia non sumpsisse, anathema sit in perpetuum".

4:23-25), and the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13). Other amulets consisted of some verses from Psalm 91 that deal with protection against evil powers, or texts from other psalms or the Hebrew names of angels.²⁵ At the end of the fourth century John Chrysostom describes with approval how "women and little children suspend Gospels from their necks as a powerful amulet, and carry them about in all places wherever they go."²⁶ He also refers to the custom to hang a Gospel by one's bed.²⁷ These amulets with holy texts written on them were supposed to protect against illness, demons, and misfortune. He explains that if there are "spiritual books" in a house, all demons leave it, and that these books help the inhabitants not to sin.²⁸ He refers to the Jews who had amulets of texts from the Mosaic books,²⁹ and he knows that Christian parents gave pagan amulets to their children and smeared their foreheads with mud in order to turn away an evil eye, witchcraft, and envy. Instead, he wants their children to receive a cross as an amulet.³⁰ So we see that John Chrysostom agrees that biblical books and texts and other Christian amulets have an apotropaic and prophylactic effect.

Gregory of Nyssa writes in the biography of his sister Macrina that she also had a little cross around her neck as an amulet.³¹ In his biography of Bishop Meletius Gregory tells that after his death his clothes were torn apart in order to serve as amulets.³² Augustine praises the Christian who puts a Gospel on his head in case of a headache, for he prefers this to resorting to pagan amulets and sorcery. In passing Augustine acknowledges that the latter practice occurred often enough among his flock.³³

Not all Church Fathers, however, passed a positive judgement on the use of amulets for an apotropaic effect. One of the decisions of the Synod of Laodicea (held between 360 and 380 CE) reads that priests and other clergymen are forbidden to make amulets.³⁴ Jerome, monk in Bethlehem, thinks that amulets with Gospel texts and wooden crosses are inspired by the Jewish amulets mentioned in Matthew 23:5 and therefore rejects them.³⁵ In the first half of the sixth century Caesarius of Arles reports that priests and monks offer amulets with texts from Scripture, but he is very severe on these people and calls them servants of the devil.³⁶

V. BLESSED OIL

²⁵ See e.g. K. Preisendanz, A. Heinrichs (eds), *Papyri Graecae Magicae. Die Griechischen Zauberpapyri II*, München / Leipzig, K.G. Saur, 1974² [reprint], 211-213, 217, 226-228; H. Mulder, "De canon en het volksgeloof. Een onderzoek van de amuletten der eerste Christenen", *Gereformeerd Theologisch Tijdschrift* 54 (1954) 97-138; G.J.M. Bartelink, 'Phylaktêrion – phylacterium', in: *Mélanges Christine Mohrmann. Nouveau recueil offert par ses anciens élèves*, Utrecht / Antwerp, Spectrum, 1973, 25-60; E.A. Judge, "The Magical Use of Scripture in the Papyri", in: E.W. Conrad, E.G. Newing, *Perspectives on Language and Text. Essays and Poems in Honor of Francis I. Andersen*, Winona Lake Indiana, Eisenbrauns, 1987, 339-349; H.D. Betz (ed.), *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation Including the Demotic Spells*, Chicago / London, University of Chicago Press, 1986; M. Meyer, R. Smith (eds), *Ancient Christian Magic. Coptic Texts of Ritual Power*, San Francisco, Harper, 1994; *Opus Imperfectum in Matthaëum* 43 (PG 56, 878).

²⁶ John Chrysostom, *Homiliae ad populum Antiochenum* 19,4 (PG 49, 196). He adds: "Thus do thou write the commands of the Gospel and its laws upon thy mind" (transl. NPNF I, IX, 470).

²⁷ *Homiliae in primam epistulam ad Corinthios* 43,4 (PG 61, 373). However, this reference is part of John Chrysostom's comment on almsgiving (1 Cor. 16:2), which reads: "since not even the Gospel hanging by our bed is more important than that alms should be laid up for you; for if you hang up the Gospel and do nothing, it will do you no such great good" (transl. NPNF I, XII, 262).

²⁸ John Chrysostom, *Homiliae in Lazarum* 3,2 (PG 48, 994).

²⁹ John Chrysostom, *Homiliae in Matthaëum* 72,2 (PG 58, 669).

³⁰ John Chrysostom, *Homiliae in primam epistulam ad Corinthios* 12, 7 (PG 61, 105-106).

³¹ Gregory of Nyssa, *Vita Macrinae* 30 (SC 178, 238-243); from 380-383 CE.

³² Gregory of Nyssa, *In Meletium* (GNO 9, 456); from 380-383 CE.

³³ Augustine, *Homiliae in Johannem* 7,7; 7,12 (CCSL 36, 71; 73); from 413 CE.

³⁴ Canon 36 (ed. J.D. Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio II*, Graz, Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1960 [reprint], 570).

³⁵ Jerome, *Commentarium in Matthaëum* IV,23 (SC 259, 162-167); from 398 CE.

³⁶ Caesarius, *Homiliae* 50,1 (SC 243, 416-421).

In the preceding sections we saw that by taking part in the *pharmakon* of the eucharist and by wearing Christian amulets Christians hoped that these practices would effectuate spiritual and physical healing and protection against diseases and demons. In the first centuries of the Christian era the Church also practiced anointment with oil in order to bring about healing. In the New Testament this rite is briefly described in the epistle of James 5:13-15 and is referred to in the Gospel of Mark 6:13. Moreover, after baptism Christians were anointed with oil, as we can deduce already from 1 John 2:20, 27. Because of these practices, several ancient Church orders contain prescriptions for the blessing of the oil, which read that by God's grace the blessed oil should grant healing and deliverance from demons to all those who were anointed.³⁷ A fine example is the following prayer written by Serapion of Thmuis:

We invoke you who have all authority and power, the Saviour of all men, Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and pray you to send healing power of the Only-begotten from heaven upon this oil, that it may become to those who are being anointed with it, or are partaking of these your creatures, for a throwing off of every sickness and every infirmity, for a charm (*alexipharmakon*) against every demon, for a separation of every unclean spirit, for a driving out of every fever and ague and every infirmity, for good grace and remission of sins, for a medicine (*pharmakon*) of life and salvation, for health and soundness of soul, body, spirit, for perfect strengthening. O Master, let every Satanic energy, every demon, every device of the adversary, every plague, every scourge, every pain, every labour or stroke or shaking or evil shadowing, fear your holy name which we have now invoked and the name of the Only-begotten; and let them depart from the inward and the outward parts of these thy servants, that this name may be glorified who for us was crucified and rose again, who took up our sicknesses and our infirmities, Jesus Christ, and who is coming to judge the living and the dead. Because through him to you is the glory and the strength in the Holy Spirit both now and to all the ages of the ages.³⁸

Bishop Serapion would never agree that such a prayer might be called magic, but from a distance one may still say that it has magic features. Apparently these Christian rites of prayer for and anointment of ill people were alternatives to similar pagan rituals. Thus Caesarius of Arles admonishes his audience that someone who is ill should receive the body and the blood of Christ, and should humbly and faithfully ask the priests to anoint his body with the blessed oil. Caesarius asks: for if we can find these two good things (i.e., the eucharist and the anointment) in the church, why should ill people let themselves in for a multiple evil by resorting to magicians, sources, trees, diabolic amulets, and soothsayers?³⁹ Here it appears quite clearly that Christians in Arles and its surroundings regularly slid back into the rituals of their former pagan religion, and that the Christians rituals were considered as alternatives to pagan magic.

VI. THE POWER OF WORDS AND NAMES

Not only tangible objects like amulets, bread, oil, and their corresponding rituals were believed to have a wholesome, healing and apotropaic effect in cases of illness and evil; also the use of words and names was believed to be most powerful. A famous example can be found in Origen's homily on Joshua 15. This chapter contains a long list of Hebrew geographical names in Canaan, the land promised to the Israelites. Origen deals with the question what the use is of reading all these names in the church. He answers that even if we do not understand the reading of the Word of God, it may still be very useful for our souls. He refers to pagans who murmur charms and invoke names, the sense of which is unknown to them. Nevertheless the effect of their invocations is that they make serpents sleep or call them forth from their caves. Swellings, inflammations, and other diseases are said to disappear, and senses are made

³⁷ *Apostolic Tradition* 5,2 (transl. Dix, *Apostolic Tradition*, 10); *Apostolic Constitutions* VIII,29 (SC 336, 232-233); Serapion, *Euchologion* 17,2; 22,2 (ed. Funk, *Didascalia et Constitutiones Apostolorum* II, 180, 184).

³⁸ Serapion, *Euchologion* 29 (ed. Funk, *Didascalia et Constitutiones Apostolorum* II, 190-192; translation adapted from Wordsworth, *Bishop Sarapion's Prayer-Book*, 77-78).

³⁹ Caesarius, *Homiliae* 13,3 (SC 175, 422-423); cf. *Homiliae* 50,1 (SC 243, 416-421).

insensible by merely reciting these words, although Origen adds, “yet where faith in Christ does not resist them”; this means that these charms and names have no hold on faithful Christians. His argument is that even though these charms and invocations are powerful, “we” (the Christians) believe that the words and names of Holy Scripture are even more powerful. For if in a pagan context the demonic powers hear and obey the charms and conjurations, this is even truer when the celestial powers, i.e., God’s angels, hear the words and names from Scripture from our mouths. According to Origen we have all sorts of spiritual powers within us. As far as there are good powers within us, they are nourished by the readings from Scripture, and the same is true for our souls and bodies, even though we do not understand exactly what happens. Origen says that when a serpent, i.e., a hostile power, lives within us, it is chased away by the Word of God.⁴⁰

In his apology against Celsus Origen extensively deals with the power that is related to names. Celsus had accused Jesus of performing his miracles by means of magic; he used the disapproving term *goêteia*, which can also be translated as charlatanism. Celsus admits that Christians also seem to possess power by pronouncing the names of certain demons. Origen’s answer is that Christians do not have power by any incantations but that they invoke the name of Jesus and recite the stories about him, and that by doing so they have often caused demons to be driven out of men. He declares that this is especially effectuated when those who recite these stories do so with real sincerity and genuine belief, but he adds that the name of Jesus is so powerful against demons that sometimes it is effective even when pronounced by bad men. He then refers to Jesus’ saying, “Many shall say to me in that day, In your name we have cast out demons and performed miracles” (Matthew 7:22; subsequently Jesus says there: “I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers”).⁴¹

Further on Origen acknowledges that magic names invoked by Persian magicians or by Indian Brahmans have a power in themselves, and that this is also true of Hebrew names of God, like Sabaoth and Adonai. He says that these names and the corresponding charms can only be effective when they are pronounced in the original language, whereas in translation a spell is weak and ineffective.⁴² Origen remarks that the formula “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (Exodus 3:6) is used not only by Jews when they exorcise demons, but also by almost all those who deal in magic and spells. Furthermore he says that “the God of Israel”, “the God of the Hebrews”, and “the God who drowned the king of Egypt and the Egyptians in the Red Sea”, are formulae which are often used to overcome demons.⁴³ In general this information is confirmed by magical papyri.⁴⁴

Origen’s opinion on the intrinsic magical power of untranslatable foreign words and holy names can also be found in Clement of Alexandria (at the end of the second century), when he refers to the view that prayers have greater power when uttered in a language other than Greek.⁴⁵ The fourth-century neo-Platonic philosopher Iamblichus agrees with this. In a way that reminds one of Origen’s exposé, Iamblichus explains that even when Egyptian names and

⁴⁰ Origen, *Homiliae in Jesu Nave* 20,1 (SC 71, 404-413); *Philocalia* 12 (SC 302, 388-393). See G. Sfamemi Gasparro, “Origene et la magia: teoria e prassi” in: L. Perrone, P. Bernardino, D. Marchini (eds), *Origeniana Octava. Origen and the Alexandrian Tradition. Papers of the 8th International Origen Congress Pisa, 27-31 August 2001* (BETHL 164), Leuven, University Press / Peeters, 2003, 733-756.

⁴¹ Origen, *Contra Celsum* I,6 (SC 132, 90-93; transl. H. Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1980, 9-10); cf. also I,46; II,49 (SC 132, 194-197; 394-399); VII,4; VIII,58 (SC 150, 20-23; 304-309). In his *Commentary on Matthew* Origen applies Jesus’ saying about bad people casting out demons in his name to Judas and the sons of Sceva (GCS 41, 75, catenae 150).

⁴² Origen, *Contra Celsum* I,24-25 (SC 132, 134-145); V,45 (SC 147, 128-133); VI,32 (SC 147, 258-261).

⁴³ Origen, *Contra Celsum* IV,33-34 (SC 136, 266-271; transl. Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum*, 209-210). Cf. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 85,3 (PTS 47, 217).

⁴⁴ E.g., Preisendanz, Heinreichs, *Papyri Graecae Magicae* II, 128; 154-155; 158; 161.

⁴⁵ Clement, *Stromateis* I,143,6 (SC 30, 148-151; transl. J. Ferguson, *FaCh* 85, 130).

words are meaningless (*asêma onomata*) for those who pronounce them, it only matters whether the gods understand them. Like Origen, he thinks that human beings have the mystical and arcane images of the gods in their soul. Like Origen, he is convinced that “barbarous” words may be untranslatable, because they were not established by arbitrary convention (*kata synthêkên*), but are dependent on the nature (*physei*) of the beings they designate.⁴⁶

Perhaps a reminiscence of this magical conception of foreign words can also be found in the special reverence that Christians sometimes had for Hebrew words that had remained untranslated in the Septuagint. For example, in Song of Songs 5:11 the bride says about the bridegroom: “his head is gold and *phaz*”. *Phaz* is a Hebrew word that means “pure gold”, and for an unretrievable reason this word has not been translated in the Greek text. Gregory of Nyssa, who reads “his head is gold *kephaz*”⁴⁷, thinks that this word has not been translated since the translators could not find a Greek term that rendered its exact significance. Because the Hebrew term was considered irreplaceable, Gregory is convinced that it refers to the purity of the head that is totally devoid of impure matter, i.e., Christ, who is the head of his body, the Church.⁴⁸

VII. ORIGEN’S VIEW OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MAGIC AND CHRISTIANITY

Origen’s discussions of magic, incantations, and exorcisms show that he takes the effects of pagan magic quite seriously. He acknowledges that the names of the God of Israel and of Jesus have a power that can be effective even independent of the beliefs of the one who invokes them. So far Origen shares the contemporary, non-Christian magic view of the world. Yet this does not imply that he puts pagan magic and its Christian counterpart, which manifested itself in exorcisms and healings, in one box. We saw that he was convinced that the power of magicians and of demons was destroyed when the divine light had appeared in the night of Jesus’ birth. He also says that those who worship the supreme God through Jesus, who live according to his gospel, and who use the appointed prayers continually and in the proper way day and night are not ensnared either by magic or by demons.⁴⁹ For Origen it goes without saying that Christians will never invoke the names of pagan gods, even if they have to endure outrage because of their refusal to do so. For them identification of Zeus with Sabaoth is out of the question; on the contrary, they hold that there is nothing divine about Zeus at all, but that a certain demon delights in being so called.⁵⁰ According to Origen the difference between magicians (*goêtai*, which may also be translated as “charlatans”) and Jesus is that magicians show their tricks and powers without calling the spectators to moral reformation and to fear of God and his judgment, whereas Jesus performed his miracles to these ends.⁵¹ Origen thinks that a true Christian who submits himself to God and his Word is superior to demons, and the man who concerns himself with the names of demons and with spells will be abandoned by God to those demons.⁵² Furthermore, for him it is clear that Christians can pray

⁴⁶ Iamblichus, *On the mysteries* VII,4-5 (ed. and transl. E.C. Clarke, J.M. Dillon, J.P. Hershbell, *Iamblichus: De mysteriis* [Writings from the Greco-Roman World 4], Atlanta, Society of Biblical Literature, 2003, 296-302).

⁴⁷ *Kephaz* derives from *kai phaz*, “and pure gold”.

⁴⁸ Gregory of Nyssa, *In Canticum Canticatorum* 13 (GNO 6, 390-391). For more examples see R. Roukema, “L’interprétation patristique de quelques mots hébraïques de la Septante”, in: J. Joosten, Ph. Le Moigne (eds), *L’apport de la Septante aux études sur l’antiquité. Actes du colloque de Strasbourg 8-9 novembre 2002* (Lectio Divina 203), Paris, Cerf, 2005, 269-288.

⁴⁹ Origen, *Contra Celsum* VI,41 (SC 147, 276-277; transl. Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum*, 356).

⁵⁰ Origen, *Contra Celsum* V,46 (SC 147, 132-135; transl. Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum*, 301).

⁵¹ Origen, *Contra Celsum* I,68; II,51 (SC 132, 268-269; 402-407; transl. Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum*, 63; 105-106).

⁵² Origen, *Contra Celsum* VIII,36; VIII,61 (SC 150, 252-255; 312-315; transl. Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum*, 478; 498).

to God and praise him in their own tongue, whether Greek or Latin or whichever language. He says that the supreme God is not one of those that have been allotted a particular language, who do not understand the rest or are not willing to pay attention to those who speak in other languages.⁵³

VIII. CONCLUSION

As for Origen we have seen that on the one hand he acknowledges the correspondence between pagan and Christian usage of holy names and words, whereas on the other hand he makes a sharp distinction between the invocation of pagan powers and faith in Jesus and the supreme God. John Chrysostom, Augustine of Hippo, and Caesarius of Arles distinguished in a similar way between pagan amulets and other magic practices on the one hand and Christian alternatives on the other hand. In spite of the superficial, outward correspondences of acts and objects in paganism and Christianity, the Christian leaders of the first centuries saw an essential difference between pagan magic and the rituals – or, sacraments – that were performed in the name of Jesus Christ. Ordinary believers, however, were not always averse to traditional non-Christian magic rituals.

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⁵³ Origen, *Contra Celsum* VIII,37 (SC 150, 254-257; transl. Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum*, 479).