The Greek evil eye, African witchcraft, and Western ethnocentrism

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to illustrate the ethnocentrism of Western thought by projecting its own science-oriented culture onto cultures with different beliefs. A comparative study between African witchcraft and the Greek phenomenon of the evil eye will be done to investigate whether similar reasons can be given for their existence today. The article reflects on the view that has been prevalent since the Enlightenment, namely that belief in the supernatural is "primitive" and has no place in a world where most things can be explained or solved scientifically. Against this background, contemporary Western perspectives on evil are explained and compared with those of the Greek Orthodox worldview, which shows similarities with New Testament textual evidence. This correlation is demonstrated by an anthropological perspective on the phenomenon of the evil eye as seen from a social, cultural and ecological point of view. These insights are compared with the belief in witchcraft, demonic possession and exorcism within African tradition and spirituality.

1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this article is to illustrate how the Western perception of evil is often projected onto non-Western cultures resulting in the problem of ethnocentrism. A comparison between phenomenon of African witchcraft and the Greek evil eye will be done to illustrate the problem of ethnocentrism. African and Greek cultures still hold on to their beliefs of witchcraft and the evil eye, respectively, and have done so for centuries.

The Greek Orthodox Church and the African Indigenous Churches believe in the existence of the demonic. Western influence has not succeeded in changing this. Although these communities still hold on to "superstitious"

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beliefs that predate Jesus, and are criticized by Western thought for being "primitive", they still adhere to these beliefs. These "superstitions" of the evil eye and witchcraft are socially transmitted from one generation to the next. It could then be argued that Western beliefs on evil and Satan are also socially transmitted rather than being primarily based on "scientific findings".

Much has been written by anthropologists (see Dionisopoulos-Mass 1976; Hardie 1981) and theologians on the evil eye (see Elliott 1988; 1990; 1991; 1992) and African witchcraft (see Ferdinando 1999:101; Kgatla 2000:149-150; Van Wyk 2004:1218). Likewise, much has been written about Satan and the Biblical texts in which Satan is mentioned (seeTwelftree 1993; 1999; Pagels 1995; Page 1995; Hill & Walton 2000), African religions (see Ejiza 1991:166; Oosthuizen 1992:54;), and the Greek Orthodox Church's belief of Satan, (see Papademetriou 1974:66-72; Schmemann 1974:23; Ware 1996:57-58; Cunningham 2002:149-150). A comparison of two different cultures should be done carefully. A culture should first be understood "in terms of its own values, goals, and focuses before venturing to compare it (either positively or negatively) with any other culture" (Kraft 1979:49). This careful approach is termed "cultural validity" and was devised by anthropologists as a means to combat ethnocentrism. Anthropologist William Graham Sumner (1840-1910) (1906:13) who coined the word "ethnocentrism" defines the term as the

> view of things in which one's own group is the center of everything, and all the others are scaled and rated with reference to it. … Each group nourishes its own pride and vanity, boasts itself superior, exalts its own divinities, and looks with contempt on outsiders. Each group thinks its own folkways the only right ones, and if it observes that other groups have other folkways, these excite its scorn.

Richard Rohrbaugh's[2] (2006) article entitled, "Hermeneutics as cross-cultural encounter: Obstacles to understand", addresses the Western problem of thinking that the Bible was written for "us". Rohrbaugh looks at how Americans project their own culture onto the Bible, misunderstanding what Biblical authors intended. Van Aarde (2000:223) puts it as follows: "The authors of the Bible wrote down *their* experiences, including *their* experiences of and witness concerning God. In this way the writers of the gospels, from within *their* world and its way of thinking, allowed their meeting with Jesus and *their* interpretations of the traditions concerning Jesus to appear in *their* manuscripts." Although Rohrbaugh's article was written from an American

[2] Prof Dr Richard Rohrbaugh is Professor Emeritus of New Testament at Lewis & Clark College, Portland (OR) USA.

perspective, it is equally applicable to other Western Christian contexts, such as, for example, South Africa.

Rohrbaugh (2006:560) explains that, while there is a recognition of cultural differences in face-to-face encounters, Westerners seem to forget this when reading something that is not of their own culture. He says that, although Westerners are aware of the fact that they read the Bible with "culturally conditioned eyes", Western Biblical scholars still seem to ignore the fact that the Bible is not a Western book. In Rohrbaugh's (2006:565) opinion, when people are partaking in cross-cultural communications and they detect a threat to their identity in any way, this may lead to: 1) rejection of the other person; 2) the projection of stereotypes onto the other person; or 3) the projection of a person's own identity which is assumed to be universal. The result is often a dislike of the other culture. As was illustrated above, different cultures often misunderstand one another because they do not have full understanding of one another's cultural behaviours and thought processes.

This is also true for the religious beliefs and the understandings different cultures have of evil. Mediterranean and African cultures believe in evil spirits and Satan as *actual beings* that can cause serious harm and health problems to people. In Western thought there are many theories for explaining the problem of evil,[3] and Satan is mostly seen as a *symbol* of evil (Russell 1986:266; cf Hinson 1992:478). "Many modern theologians consider the Devil to be a symbol of the powers of evil, of the worst qualities of human nature, or of the destructive forces of the universe" (WBE 1992:145). This view leads to misunderstandings. Westerners see cultures that believe in evil spirits as primitive (Page 1995:267), while cultures like those in Africa which believe in evil spirits, distrust Western approaches to healing, which they see as "impersonal" (Kraft 1979:305; cf Pilch 2000:25). In this article a comparison is made between African witchcraft and the Greek evil eye to show how Western thought, in projecting its own scientifically oriented culture onto cultures with different beliefs, often falls into the trap of ethnocentrism. The focus of this article will not be on the connection between evil as a "super-natural" metaphysical entity (as seen from an Eurocentric perspective) and its anthropological implications for evil human behaviour.

2. CONTEMPORARY THEORIES OF SATAN

"Satan" is the anglicization of the Hebrew noun sātān, which means "the adversary", "accuser" or "opponent" (Breytenbach & Page 1999:276). "Devil"

[3] The problem of evil is a massive topic. For some examples on the topic of "evil and God", see M M Adams & R M Adams (1990; 1999); R Swinburn (1998) and D Z Phillips (2005).

is derived from the Greek word *diabolos*, and means "slanderer", "enmity" or "quarrel" (Riley 1999:244). Since the Enlightenment, belief in the supernatural has been considered primitive and something which has no place in a world where most things can be explained or solved scientifically (Sanders & Davies 1990:163-173; cf Page 1995:267). Hinson (1992:479) puts it as follows: "Does the Devil get his due? The mainstream of Christian theologians have answered that question in the negative just as they have rejected absolute dualism. Scriptures and human experience, they have said, require us to view evil with utmost seriousness but at the same time not to accord it the status of an eternal principle equal with God". Yet there remains a mixed view on the existence of Satan (see Van der Loos 1968:33-34).

Karl Barth (1886-1968) believed that certain areas were left uncreated by God. These areas are called "nothingness", lacking true being. "Nothingness" does exist, since it can arise on its own. The Devil arose from "nothingness" and therefore is not a creation of God, although the Devil exists in God's creation. The Devil has no true being, opposes true being, and aims to destroy true being. God may allow the Devil some power, but also uses creation to stop the Devil (Barth 1939-1967:Vol 13). Recent scholars have come to some consensus on the understanding of Satan and evil:

- Jim Garrison[4] sees Hiroshima as a symbol of evil. He describes God as a "bipolar" God who "creates real evil" and "creates real good". In his view God is the author of both good and evil (Garrison 1982:173-174).

- Petrue Dimitriue (1982:58-61) argues that Satan is a much needed symbol of evil, regardless of whether he operates independently of God or not. Radical evil is as immense as God – a God who can be full of love, beauty and joy, and a God who can tolerate all human suffering. The human tendency to deny the existence of Satan is seen by Dimitriue explains as follows: "… it is a refusal of the very notion of guilty intent, of culpability, of sin" (Kirkup 1982:59). Of all God's creatures, human beings are the only ones who enjoy inflicting pain on one another.

- Glenn Hinson (1992:484-486) points out that ultimately only God knows whether an actual Satan and demons exist. Hinson (1992:486) explains that there is a "certain mystery about evil". He goes on to say that it is difficult to simply attribute all human evil to a satanic scapegoat. Hinson

[4] Jim Garrison holds a PhD in Philosophical Theology from Cambridge University.

> struggles to understand why God would allow Satan and his demons to cause so much horror in the world. He puts it as follows: "We would still have to explain why God would allow them to do evil of such magnitude, however, just as we would, why God would allow human beings to defy the divine purpose" (Hinson 1992:486).

Jeffrey Burton Russell[5] (1981:220-222) distinguishes seven reasons why people of Western cultures object to a belief in a personified Satan. These reasons are following:

- the belief that scientific knowledge is the only true knowledge and that it can prove or disprove theories conclusively;
- to believe in the supernatural, and therefore Satan, is regarded as "primimtive;
- all religions, and not only Christianity have explanations for evil that are not necessarily attributed to one evil being, which means that evil can be explained without involving Satan (see Russell 1981:221);
- the inconsistent belief in Satan of main-line Christian churches;
- the inconsistent mention of Satan in the Scriptures;
- the inconsistent experience of Satan in daily life;
- the inconsistence of diabology.[6]

The evil that has been suffered and is still suffered by humanity on a daily basis, begs explanation. Who is to blame for extreme evil – human beings themselves, Satan, or God? It would be considered "primitive" to say that an actual satanic being with an entourage of angels exists and can cause such evil. Therefore theologians look for alternative answers. This has resulted in different and abstract theories concerning Satan's "symbolic" role. From a sociological perspective this could mean that Westerners are conditioned to believe in Satan as a *concept* rather than a *being* with supernatural powers. As was illustrated above, Westerners, whose culture is individualistic look to psychology to explain human behaviour. What some cultures would explain as having been caused by the demonic, is simply seen as needing psychotherapy. Others blame extreme evil on the human beings themselves

[5] Jeffrey Burton Russell is a Professor of History, Emeritus, at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

[6] Diabology is the "doctrine concerning the Devil or devil, diabolic lore" (Barnhart & Barnhart 1983:576).

and by default exclude the concept of Satan as a being with supernatural powers.

3. THE DEMONIC FROM A GREEK ORTHODOX WORLD-VIEW

3.1 The belief in the evil eye

One of the most prominent phenomena in Greek culture is the belief in the evil eye. John Elliott[7] has studied this phenomenon extensively on a cross-cultural basis. This study will explore his theory on the evil eye and apply it to the pervasive African belief in witchcraft.

According to Greek Orthodox belief, Satan is a being created by God as an angel. Father Alexander Schmemann (1921-1983),[8] describes Satan as follows: "He is so to speak, perfect enough, wise enough, powerful enough, one can almost say divine enough, to know God and not to surrender to Him – to know Him and yet to opt against Him, to desire freedom from Him" (Schmemann1974:23). Satan and other angels chose to oppose God, then "fell from that divinely given rank and glory to become the perversion of angelic nature that was understood to constitute a demonic being" (Greenfield 1988:8). Therefore Satan and the demons were not *created* evil, but *chose* to be thus. In St Chrysostom's (in Schaff 1975:189) words: "Let the Devil be allowed to be exceedingly wicked, not by nature, but by choice and convictions." Satan is a liar who, with the demons, seeks to destroy all that is good. Saint Antony the Great (in Quasten & Plumpe 1950:38-39) explains how Satan and the demons are "envious of us Christians, they leave nothing undone to hinder us from entering Heaven: they do not want us to mount to the place from which they have fallen."

There are accounts, both past and present, of people who have been afflicted by demonic possession (see Cunningham 2002:149-150; Papademetriou 1974:66-72). Another phenomenon, which is recognized by the Church, is that of the evil eye and its connection to demonic influence. The Greek Orthodox Church recognizes Satan as a real being who is experienced, "or rather, we know about it [evil] only through our own experience of evil" (Schmemann 1974:23). It is not a matter of theorizing about Satan, it is rather a matter of acknowledging and fighting Satan. In Schmemann's (1974:23)

[7] John Elliott is Emeritus Professor of Theology and Religious Studies of the University of San Francisco.

[8] Father Alexander Shmemann was a prominent 20th century Orthodox Christian priest, theologian and writer. He was the dean of St Vladimir Seminar in New York till his death in 1983.

words: “If there is one thing we learn from spiritual experience, it is that evil is not to be ‘explained’ but faced and fought.” Bishop Kalistos Ware (1996:57-58) explains: “For us, at this present stage in our earthly existence, Satan is the enemy; but Satan has also a direct relationship with God, of which we know nothing at all and about which it is not wise to speculate. Let us mind our own business.”

The Lord’s Prayer (Mt 6:9-13) is an example of how the Greek Orthodox Church recognizes Satan as a being. In the English translation the ending of the prayer is as follows: “but deliver us from evil” (Mt 6:13). However, when the same phrase is directly translated from the Greek, it reads as follows: “but deliver us from the evil one.” Therefore the “evil one” is a being from whom humans need protection, rather than just an indication of the existence of random evil that could befall us all. In the Greek Orthodox tradition the fight with Satan and the demons begins with the baptismal rite. Any demonic forces that may be present are exorcised before the commencement of the baptism. This rite will be discussed presently.

3.2 Jesus and the evil eye

According to the Gospels of Matthew (6:22-23; 20:15), Luke (11:34-36) and Mark (7:21-23), Jesus mentions the evil eye, which was part of his culture and tradition (see Elliott 1992:52). In Matthew (6:19-24), in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus’ teaching concerns the anxieties people experience when they covet more material possessions. Jesus explains that it is better to attach oneself to heavenly treasures, rather than to material ones. The anxiety to gain more material possessions could make people envious of others’ possessions, and that could result in their having an “evil eye”, which darkens their bodies and souls. The evil eye causes a person to be mean, lacking in generosity, hoarding all their earthly goods (see Allen; Sparks; Najim & Stylianopoulos 1997:20; Duncan & Derrett 1995:68). Elliott (1994:80) explains the evil eye as follows: “It entails a subtle but clear call for a moral integrity and generosity and a warning against the vice of envy and the beginning of one’s substance to those in need. Its specifically Jewish coloration lies in the association of the Evil Eye with a moral disposition and behaviour which is inconsistent with the will of God.” Similarly, in Luke 11:33-36 Jesus speaks of protecting one’s body from being filled by darkness by making sure that your eyes are full of light.

In Matthew (20:1-16) Jesus tells the parable of the labourers who are hired at various stages during the day, which means that some had worked fewer hours than others. The labourers who had worked a full day were upset and questioned their employer when he paid all of them the same wage. To

this he responded: “Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good?” Jesus’ lesson here is that it does not matter to God how long a person serves Him, but that he/she does. The kingdom of heaven is not only reserved for those that have always served God. Those who begrudge the late-comers their good fortune by having an evil eye, may find this to be self-defeating. People should commit themselves to God without having to judge the commitment of others to God (Duncan & Derrett 1995:65-72). Elliott (1992:62) puts it as follows: “The malignant Evil Eye and the social destructive force of its envy source serves here as a negative foil for affirming the unlimited nature of divine compassion, Jesus’ solidarity with the poor and undeserving, the importance of communal sharing and social cohesion, and a calculus according to which the last shall be first and the first last.”

In Mark 7:1-23 Jesus is questioned by the Pharisees about why some of his disciples do not uphold the Jewish tradition of washing their hands and utensils before they eat. Jesus explains to the Pharisees that it is more important to be spiritually clean than to be physically clean. For it is from within that hearts are defiled. Elliott (1988:60) puts it as follows: “The concept of the Evil Eye in this case plays only a brief illustrative role in a list of vices linked to the internal disposition of the heart”. According to Elliott, the pervasive belief of the evil eye has existed from ancient to modern times because of the economic, the social and the ecological environment. Elliott (1990:263; 1991:147) explains how the phenomenon of the evil eye has been studied extensively by anthropologists (see Forster 1972:165-202; Russell 1982:539-48), historians (see Bernidaki-Aldous 1988:39-48) and folklorists (see Lykiaropoulos 1981:221-230; Hardie 1981:107-103), but has hardly been touched on by Biblical exegetes and theologians. Elliott focuses on the salient features of the evil eye and the cross-cultural environment in which it flourished and regulated people’s social interactions in Biblical communities. The evil eye is an ancient and far-reaching phenomenon that exists in the Near East and Mediterranean regions. “The evidence at hand leads one to think that the evil eye is probably one of the oldest continuous religious constructs in the Mediterranean basin” (Moss & Cappannari 1976:12). Today this belief still strongly influences Judaism as well as Muslim and Christian communities (Elliott 1992:53). This belief has been traced to sixty-seven cultures and is similar across cultures.

3.2 The “basic” belief

The basic belief in the evil eye consists of the notion that there are people, animals, demons or gods who have the power to cause harm to those of

whom they are envious or jealous, just by looking at them (cf Nicholson 1999:18). People may become ill, have accidents, misfortunes, or even die. Those who possess the evil eye may cause harm to others, knowingly or unknowingly. Some people are not aware that they have the ability to harm another with an envious glance. The eye is believed to be the window to the soul, physically exposing a person's inner being. Through this window evil spirits/demons enter the body, empowering the jealous or envious person to cause harm to others (Moss & Cappannari 1976:2). The evil eye is associated with envy, greed, stinginess and not wanting to share ones possessions with those in need. It exposes "a heart that was hardened and a hand that was shut to a neighbour in need" (Elliott 1991:149). Socially this means that the evil eye is prominent where there is a large gap between the "haves" and the "have-nots".

In the two-class social system of antiquity the privileged worried about the evil eye. Persons who had a sudden turn of fortune could become the object of envy and therefore become vulnerable to the evil eye. The privileged were most susceptible to the evil eye, as were children, work places and animals (Elliott 1990:264; 1991:149; 1992:53; cf Dionisopoulos-Mass 1976:49). Those suspected of having the power of the evil eye were neighbours, relatives, those with ocular impairments (e.g. the blind), those with strange ocular features (e.g. joined eyebrows), those with physical deformities (e.g. humpbacks), those with physical disabilities (e.g. epileptics), those who were socially displaced (e.g. widows), social deviants (e.g. those who lacked in generosity or virtue), strangers and enemies (Elliott 1992:53).

People did not want to be suspected by society of possessing the evil eye. Therefore they had to go out of their way to be generous to those in need, without begrudging the gift they had given. It was thought best to avoid complementing people on their possessions. If a compliment was passed "words of praise or admiration are given or received with such accompanying phrases as "*Mashallah*", "*Grazia a Di"*, "God be praised", by which God is invoked as protector and ultimate source of blessing" (Elliott 1988:50).

Many methods and devices were used to ward off the evil eye. Precautions included, avoiding the direct stare of another person, the concealing of women, children, food, and prized possessions (Elliott 1988:47). It was thought best to deny any recent improvement in one's financial status. Manual gestures such as a clenched fist and extended middle finger (digitus infamus) and spitting in the presence of those suspected of possessing the evil eye, especially in the presence of strangers, epileptics and the physically disabled were also used as means to ward off the evil eye. Personal protection included the wearing of protective amulets such as jewellery or for

instance blue "eyes" and phalluses, blue or red cloth or sacks filled with rue and garlic (cf Papanikolas 2002:29). Grotesque masks and huge statues of phalluses (cf Gravel 1995:65-74) protected public places and walls were inscribed with evil eye incantations. Elliott (1990:268) explains it as follows: "The underlying principle was that of homeopathic magic and *similia similibus*, the use of 'like against like'."

3.3 The ecological, cultural and social conditions

Anthropologists and historians have thoroughly researched and documented the phenomenon of the evil eye from social, cultural and ecological perspectives. People in the Mediterranean world lived in a predictable ecological environment where resources were scarce (see Stegemann & Stegemann [1995] 1999:15-52). "The environment where evil eye belief and behaviour was pronounced was characterized by cultural complexity, peasant-urban economy, technological specialization including metal-working, grain agriculture, domesticated large animals, milking and dairying (Elliott 1992:55). Ancient societies were based on a two-class system, inhabited by landholders, bureaucrats, herders, agriculturalists and artisans (see Lenski et al [1970] 1995:217). People lived in constant social tension because an improvement in family financial status was usually at the expense of another family. This resulted in people feeling vulnerable and suspicious of their neighbours, family and friends. This kind of environment bred envy, which in turn led to the notion of the evil eye. No one wanted to be struck by the evil eye or be thought to possess it. Therefore people went out of their way to be generous with their possessions, avoided admiring other people's possessions and concealed their own. The evil eye served "as an informal mechanism for regulating behaviour and social interaction" (Elliott 1992:147).

3.4 The evil eye in modern Greek society

The evil eye is deeply rooted in the faith, culture and traditions of modern day Greek culture. Most of what was summarized in Elliott's theory is still prevalent in Mediterranean societies today (Malina 1989:128). It is still believed that people can be so envious of others, that they are able to cause them harm. People still downplay their wealth, possessions and intelligence. Children are still thought to be most susceptible and small iconic jewellery and amulets are often pinned onto the clothing of babies (cf Papanikolas 2002:29-53). A baby who is interrupted during breastfeeding is also believed to have the ability to cast the evil eye. Neighbours, friends and relatives are often suspected of possessing the evil eye, and people go out of their way not to be suspected of it. If people compliment others they may follow it by spitting on

the person and saying "so I don't put the evil eye on you." The custom of spitting has become an act of safeguarding loved ones from the evil eye (Elworthy 1958:412). If a person suddenly becomes afflicted with a headache, lethargy, nausea or dizziness they will assume that someone has put the "*mati*" (eye) on them.

In Greece a distinction is made between *matiazma* and *vascania*. *Matiasma* comes from the Greek word *mati*, which means eye and is unknowingly caused by most people at one time or another. *Vaskania*, which means to "kill with the eye", is considered extremely harmful and can even cause death. It is believed that a person who puts a *vaskania* on another, does so intentionally (Dionisopoulos-Mass 1976:51-52).[9]

The Greek Orthodox Church recognizes the evil eye, and the notion that demonic forces may influence the ability of some people to cause others harm just by glancing at them. St Basil the Great wrote a homily on envy, explaining how envy is of the Devil, and that it is harmful to those who are consumed by it, as well as to those they envy. In St Basil's (in Wagner 1950:465) own words: "As rust wears away iron, so envy corrodes the soul it inhabits. More than this, it consumes the soul that gives it birth, like the vipers which are said to be born by eating their way through the womb that conceived them" (Haereses). St Basil goes on to explain how envious people secretly enjoy seeing those that they envy fall into misfortune. "In a word, he [she] is an enemy of present good fortune but its friend when it is no longer possessed" (in Wagner 1950:465). When members of the Church feel that the evil eye has been put on them, the priest reads the prayers from the Euchologion in order to exorcise the evil eye. This practice is known as *xematiasma*.

The Greek Orthodox Church forbids its members to consult and make use of individuals who use magic rituals to get rid of the evil eye (Prokurate, Golitze & Peterson 1996:125; cf Papademetriou 1974:49-51; Dundes1984: 329). The Greek Orthodox Church does not recognize the wearing of amulets as a form of protection against the evil eye, though many members of the Greek Orthodox Church wear these amulets (usually blue stones or small "eyes") in conjunction with their crosses.[10] They believe that prevention is

[9] Greeks also distinguish between *koutsoboulio* (gossip) and *glossofeya* (devour with the tongue). *Koutsoboulio* has an important social function, and although not necessarily considered exactly true or good "reinforces norms of society" (Dionisopoulos-Mass 1976:58). *Glossofeya* is malicious and harmful gossip. It is done with the intention to ruin the reputation of another. "The victim may never have committed the act of which he is accused" (Dionisopolulos-Mass 1976:59). *Glossofeya* is usually done by a person who envies another person, and is therefore considered to be of the demonic.

[10] A cross that is made of wood from the tree of a monastery or convent are acceptable to the Greek Orthodox Church as protection from the evil eye (Dionisopoulos-Mass 1976:52).

better than cure. People who believe that they have had the evil eye put on them, can recite the Lord's prayer until they feel better. Children cannot wear a cross before the day of their baptism. Therefore parents attach a variety of charms to their unbaptised infants' clothing in order to protect them from the evil eye (Dionisopoulos-Mass 1976:52). The Greek Orthodox Church recommends that small icons that have been blessed by the Church can be attached to the infant. Though the Greek Orthodox Church does not approve of magic rituals, the members continue to make use of such rituals which are mostly passed on from mother to daughter. They vary from person to person depending on which village of origin. In some instances these rituals are performed also by men.

In modern Greek society the evil eye is still regarded as a serious threat and this suspicion informally regulates behaviour and social interaction. People are suspicious of those who continuously complement them or point out their status in society. No one wants to be known to possess the evil eye. People want to be seen as generous and often go out of their way to share their wealth with those less fortunate.

3.5 Exorcism and the Greek Orthodox Church

An Orthodox Christian's first line of defence against the demonic is baptism. Exorcism is practiced in the sacrament[11] of baptism when a chatechumen or baby is baptised, in case the chatechumen or baby has been demonically possessed, or has had the evil eye cast on him or her (Greenfield 1988:139; cf Papademetriou 1974:45). The baptismal rite begins with an exorcism, since the fight with Satan begins from the moment a person is marked with the sign of the Christ. The cross is breathed on the person by the priest three times, in the name of the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit (Papademetriou 1974:46; Schmemann 1974:24). St John Chrysostom placed great importance on exorcism because that would strengthen people in their struggle against Satan (see Finn 1967:82).

The exorcism begins at the door of the church where the prayers of exorcism are first read. The catechumen, or the godparent in the case of an infant, is then asked to turn to the west and renounce Satan three times, and then turn to the east to unite her/himself with Christ. This marks the end of the exorcism after which the Office of Baptism can begin. The priest says a prayer over the water, makes the sign of the cross over the water three times, and invokes the Holy Spirit. Schmemann (1974:39) explains how water has a

[11] Sacrament (mystery) is the "way in which God imparts Grace to His people" (Allen, Sparks, Najim & Stylianopoulos 1997:806). There are seven Sacraments namely: baptism, chrismation, the Holy Eucharist, confession, ordination, healing and unction (anointing of the sick with blessed oil),

three-dimensional meaning in the Greek Orthodox Church. Firstly, water symbolizes life, because nothing can exist without water. Secondly, water symbolizes destruction and death. Shmemann (1974:39) puts it as follows: "It is the mysterious depth which kills and annihilates, the dark habitation of the demonic powers, the very image of the irrational, uncontrollable, elemental in the world". Thirdly, water symbolizes purification and renewal. The priest then makes the sign of the cross in the water by dropping olive oil into it. As is the case with water, so oil also has a three-dimensional meaning. Oil symbolizes healing, light and joy. The oil is known as the oil of gladness, which means that, when the priest anoints the candidate, it symbolizes "life not as mere existence, but as fullness, joy and participation in that mysterious and ineffable essence of life which we feel from time to time in moments of happiness and exultation; life of which the Bible speaks when it calls life a gift of the Holy Spirit, the Giver of Life: life as the 'light of man'; life as not a synonym but as the content of existence; in short, life as participating in divine itself" (Schmemann 1974:51-52).

The priest then holds the candidate upright, looks to the east and immerses him/her in the water three times saying: "The servant of God, N., is baptized in the name of the Father, Amen. And of the Son, Amen. And of the Holy Spirit, Amen" (Hapgood 1975:280). "The three fold immersion becomes the adequate sign of participation in Christ's three day burial and resurrection" (Calivas 1984:37). The candidate is then dressed in a white garment, symbolizing the gifts of baptism. Once this is done, the Office of Holy Chrismation follows. The priest says a prayer and anoints the candidate with the Holy Chrism. The Holy Chrism is a sacrament whereby candidates receives the gifts of the Holy Spirit which will strengthen their spiritual life and help them in their fight against Satan (Hapgood 1974:603).

According to Calivas (1984:38), the "gift of the Holy Spirit takes the neophyte beyond the restoration of the fallen nature." After the Holy Chrism has been administered the candidates receive Holy Communion for the first time. After the age of seven, confession is obligatory before receiving Holy Communion. Candidates have their hair cut in the sign of the cross, which symbolizes submission and servitude to God (Hapgood 1974:603). Candidates are then given a cross which was bought by the sponsor or godparent and blessed by the priest. The Baptism is thus concluded.

George C Papademetriou (1974:72), pastor of SS Constantine and Helena, Greek Orthodox Church, Annapolis, Maryland explains that as a committed Christian a person should live a virtuous life, or in the case of a child, should be brought up in a virtuous manner. Prayer, fasting, confession and Holy Communion, should be a way of life, helping the person to live of

communion with God and keeping them protected from the demonic. Because human beings are fallible, priests, as Christ's representatives, should guide them to repentance and, if needs be, exorcise evil in whatever form it comes. Before an exorcism takes place medical professionals should first be consulted in order to rule out the possibility of psychological problems that could have been rectified by medical professionals.

In the Greek Orthodox view Christ is the supreme exorcist – "He who won victory over the power of the devil" (Papademetriou 1974:54). In His name priests are able to cast out demons and relieve the sufferer from the possession of evil. Prayers of exorcism are included in the Euchologion. There are three prayers written by Saint Basil the Great (300-379 AD), and four by Saint John Chrysostom (344-407 AD). While praying these prayers the priest physically imposes a holy object such as a cross, icon or holy relic[12] onto the sufferer. The sign of the cross is physically drawn on the person's body by the priest either by means of holy water or oil. The priest may also instruct the person to fast and pray after having been cured of possession (see Greenfield 1988:144-147; Papademetriou 1974:54).

As was illustrated above, Greek Orthodox Christians regard Satan and his demons as a reality. These supernatural entities are encountered in the form of the evil eye and on rare occasions also through demonic possession. The evil eye is part of the faith, culture and traditions of Greek people, who go out of their way to avoid having the evil eye put on them or their families. What is regarded as superstition in the West is a reality that is much feared in Greece and in much of the Mediterranean world. From a sociological perspective it can be said that the Greeks have been socially conditioned to believe that Satan is a being with supernatural powers. Collectivist societies, such as Geek societies tend to blame "bad luck" on external factors such as the evil eye, rather than on coincidence. Greek people see Satan as a very real threat to their well-being.

4. THE DEMONIC FROM A BLACK AFRICAN WORLD-VIEW

Witchcraft, demonic possession and exorcism have always been a reality within African traditions and spiritualities (see Kitshoff 1994:30; Pretorius, Odendaal, Robinson & Van der Merwe 1996:122). Jacob Manala (2004:1503) puts it as follows: "In the minds of many African people there is no doubt as to the reality of witchcraft … For many African people it is an existential reality." Illnesses, misfortune and disturbances are almost always attributed to evil spirits that have been caused to come upon the unfortunate person or family

[12] Relic: "part of a person's body or belonging kept as object of reverence" (Swannell 1986:460).

via a witch, wizard or sorcerer. It is believed that the illness may be cured, misfortunes reversed and disturbances cleared away by means of exorcisms, rituals, medicine and ceremonies conducted or given by witchdoctors, prayer healers or prophets. In other words, if the equilibrium of the person, family or society has become unbalanced, it should be restored (see Kitshoff 1994:30; Ferdinando 1999:43). Once restoration has taken place, preventative measures should be take for protection and, if the affected person is so inclined, witchcraft can be used to take revenge on the person believed to have sent the evil spirits. Therefore, in Africa witchcraft is practiced as a preventative measure as well as a reversal of witchcraft (see Manala 2004:1503).

Many Western societies view witchcraft, demonic possession and exorcism as outdated superstitions that can be explained and even cured by the medical sciences (see Ferdinando 1999:70; Kitshoff 1994:32). When missionaries first came to Africa, they strongly disapproved of the witchcraft that was so tightly woven into African spirituality. African people who had converted to Christianity did not feel free to approach their ministers about matters of demonic possession or exorcism. Had they done so, little or nothing would have been done for them anyway (see Kitshoff 1994:32; Ejizu 1991:166). This caused a split between the two different worlds in which African people found themselves. As the twentieth century dawned and African churches became independent of missionaries, they were free to incorporate exorcism and prayer-healing in their services (see Ejiza 1991:166; Oosthuizen 1992:54). AIC's[13] became a blend of Christianity and African traditional religions.

Most African people live in constant fear of witches and their craft. "Witchcraft raises intense fear and revulsion because it destroys human life, human community and shatters dreams and visions of individuals and societies" (Manala 2004:1500). For many Africans, including Christians, evil can be attributed to witches (see Douglas 1984:102). "They are not only antithetical to a successful and fully enhanced life here on earth, they pose the greatest threat to the attainment of ancestorhood, which is the burning desire of most traditional people" (Ejizu 1991:173). Acts such as cannibalism; necrophagy,[14] bestiality and incest are believed to be practiced by witches at their initiation or in order to enhance their mystical powers (see Ferdinando

[4] African independent churches/African initiated churches/African indigenous churches: these are African churches that have chosen to incorporate foreign religions (Christianity) with their own traditional religions forming a new religious system (see Phiri 2000:3-4).

[14] Necrophagy is "the practice or habit of feeding on dead bodies or carrion" (Barnhart & Barnhart 1983:1388).

1999:101). It is also believed that witches are jealous by nature (Hammond-Took 1989:74). They will destroy crops and livestock, and cause intense pain in those more fortunate than themselves. Van Wyk (2004: 215-1216) refers to the importance of the notion of "jealousy" [evil eye] as follows:

> By indicating "jealousy" as the most profound cause of "witchcraft", Africans concentrate on one very important aspect of evil. By attributing it to jealousy, they stress the fact that most of the time witchcraft (as well as other acts of evil) is not the result of legitimate anger, but arises from the urge to harm people who have more than you, who are more successful than you are and who have better looks than you have.

The people who are most in danger of being hurt by witches are usually their close relatives, neighbours or friends. Family, friends and neighbours will quickly accuse one another of witchcraft when there is misfortune in their lives. Jealousy and envy run rife in communities where "the good and desirable things are always in short supply. There are never enough fine cattle, fertile plots or beautiful women to go round so that competition is endemic to the human condition" (Hammond-Took 1989:81). Therefore much emphasis is placed on "trying to procure relief or salvation" (Maimela 1985:68) from witches and witchcraft. Most importantly the community wants the witches who live amongst them to be identified. Van Wyk (2004:1220) explains the effect of such identification as follows: "When witches are identified the inexplicable could be explained". Identification can also lead to actions. When witches are identified, one can know against whom to protect oneself, on whom to take revenge, and whom to chase out of the community. However the most popular method of doing away with those who are suspected of or are caught practicing witchcraft, is by hunting them down and killing them (Manala 2004:1501, cf Niehaus 2001:120,152,198). This culminates in witch-hunts and witch-killings, that result in the deaths of particularly elderly women since they are often suspected of doing witchcraft. It is believed that they stay young by feeding on their victims souls (cf Ferdinando 1999:98). People support witch-hunts because they feel that authorities are more concerned for the witch than for the victims (Peltzer & Makgoshing 2001:100).

Many African people believe that both mental and physical illness can be caused by personal sin, moral failure, the devil, demons/evil spirits (usually sent by witches), witchcraft or a specific ancestor who has become upset with them. A witch or witchdoctor may send their ancestral spirits to the victim. (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005:177; cf Bate 1995:53; Maboea 1994:125; Oosthuizen

1992:119, 126). The spirits invade the victims and cause them to suffer illness and misfortune, have nightmares and behave unnaturally (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005:167; cf Oosthuizen 1992:126). It is believed that the demon/evil spirit must not only be expelled from the victim, but also from the community (Platvoet, 2000:84). The witchdoctor identifies and diagnoses the cause of the illness by using twigs or bones as divining dice (Hammond-Took 1989:114) and extra sight (this is when they are in contact with their ancestral spirits) (see Blier 1991:77).

Ancestral spirits play an important role in helping the witchdoctor to combat the victim's ailments (Hammond-Took 1989:103-125). Witchdoctors heal with the help of ancestors and/or make up "muti" for expelling the demon/evil spirits. Sometimes the "muti" is ground into a fine powder or snuff and is given to victims to inhale in order that they can sneeze out the demon/evil spirit. Witchdoctors can also cause people on whom their patients want to take revenge, to become possessed (see Oosthuizen 1992:131).

Prayer healers or prophet diagnose through dreams or visions that they get from the Holy Spirit. Also with the help of the Holy Spirit they exorcise the evil spirit by making use of one or more of the following rituals:

- hitting the victim on the shoulders and arm with a staff or by hand in order to force the demon/evil spirit out (this is seen as hitting the demon/evil spirit and not the victim) (Oosthuizen 1992:125);

- baptism, especially in the sea, by means of which the Holy Spirit drives out the demon/evil spirit (Kitshoff 1994:39-40);

- water mixed with ash, salt, lime and other ingredients is blessed and given to the victim as an emetic – she/he vomits and expels the demon/evil spirit (Oosthuizen 1992:46);

- prayer healers/prophets immerse themselves in the sea to empower themselves or prevent themselves from being contaminated with the victim's departing demon/evil spirit (Oosthuizen 1992:115).

5. THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GREECE AND AFRICA

A distinct difference between the Greek evil eye and African witchcraft (including the evil eye in Ethiopia) is *violence*. Sometimes witchcraft leads to the death of not only the intended victim, but in some cases where human organs and genitals are needed for muti, other victims also die. Africans feel frustrated, desperate and hopeless when violence is done to themselves or

their loved ones (Masango 2004:1003). This frustration could result in revenge. A witch could be employed to hurt the person who has harmed them or a loved one. This creates a vicious cycle, making murderers out of victims.

In contrast to this, persons in Greece who are suspected of having put the evil eye on someone, are avoided as much as possible. When this is not always possible, amulets are used in stead. Very rarely does the evil eye in Greek communities lead to the death of an individual, and even when it does occur, there is often no way of finding the murderer.

There is also a distinct difference in the amulets of Greek and African cultures. Although both cultures make use of amulets, in Greece all amulets are man-made. In Africa "muti" is sometimes made of human body parts. The victim chosen for "muti" purposes suffers a gruesome death, because body parts have to be taken while the person is still alive. The person is then left to bleed to death. Most of these victims are children, though adults may also be used.

If a person is believed to be possessed by a demon, a Greek Orthodox priest will read a prayer of exorcism over the victim while physically imposing an icon, cross or holy relic on the victim. The sign of the cross is also physically drawn on the victim with holy water or oil. Once the demon has been exorcised victims may be told by the priest to pray and fast in gratitude to God for having saved them. If a person is possessed by a spirit in Africa the witch-doctor could prescribe "muti" or beat the spirit out of the victim, baptize the victim to drive out the spirit, or give the victim a mixture to cause him or her vomit the spirit out. Physical violence is one of the ways in which the victim is rid of evil spirits. The violence in African witchcraft causes a vicious cycle when the action of witchcraft leads to a violent reaction against the witch. Although there are similarities between witchcraft in Africa and the evil eye in Greece, the main difference is violence.

6. A CHRISTIAN ASSESSMENT

Witchcraft in Africa, like the evil eye in Greece, are part and parcel of these cultures, faiths and traditions. Missionaries in the West could not do away with witchcraft in Africa by "educating" the people out of their "superstitions". The idea that many things can be solved by "education" is in itself ethnocentric. Western cultures often impose their "scientific logic" on cultures that are not "scientific" and by doing so cause more harm than good. In order to help communities plagued by the horror of witchcraft, Christians could introduce Jesus as the supreme exorcist. No amulet or "muti" could protect a person from supernatural evil as effectively as Jesus whose supernatural abilities are far more powerful.

This article illustrates that African witchcraft and the Greek evil eye do exist and that similarities between the two cultures can be found on a cultural, ecological and social level. Both Greek and African communities experience ethnocentric criticism from Western scholars who label their beliefs "primitive superstitions". The evil eye and witchcraft are such beliefs. Both these beliefs are socially taught. Similarly, the belief that the evil eye and witchcraft are superstitions, is socially taught in Western cultures. The lack of insight into this fact is what often leads to misunderstandings and miscommunication between the cultures.

Western people have a "scientific" view of spirituality, whereas Greeks and Africans have a "supernatural" view. In order to avoid ethnocentricity one should endeavour to respectfully accept that each culture has its own unique social set-up, with its own reality and world-view and not make value-judgements. There is no "correct" or "incorrect" view, only the reality which human beings experience within the social framework of their culture. In other words, what is real to one person in one culture, may be unreal to another. However, neither reality is "wrong" or "inferior". When people accept the differences in cultures not as faults but as different realities, they can respectfully help one another with the problems that plague their respective communities.

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