

**A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF MAGIC IN YORUBA RELIGION AND BIBLICAL MIRACLES****BY****Olaosebikan, S. J. : Department of Christian Religious Studies, Kwara State College of Education, Ilorin; E-mail: olaosebikansaidu@gmail.com****Abstract**

*This work examined magic and miracles as spiritual elements embedded in religions, and they both alter the events or situation of life generally. Scholars of religions are of diverse opinions on these concepts. The Nexus between magic and miracles has been misconceived many. Hence, this study seeks to examine magic and Biblical miracle, thus, it focused on the area of similarities and differences of the phenomena as it affects the religious life an individual. It was discovered in this study that miracles and magic complement each other, and the two concepts could be entrenched in school curriculum so that religious scholars and researchers would have proper knowledge of them. This we believed it would awaken and preserve the religious values and heritage of the people and the society at large.*

**Keywords: Magic, Miracle, Religiosity and Yoruba Religion**

**Introduction**

Since both miracle and magic centered round the ability to alter events or situations then both become subject of controversy and therefore the need for their comparison becomes imperative for a scholar. Based on this, the researcher intends to investigate the similarities and differences between the two concepts which are the focus of the research. The study seeks to clarify the misconception of the two concepts and their implications on the present day's believers, especially the so-called miracle Workers in our society. Magic is part of Yoruba religious apparatus without which, we can say religion is not complete in our society. Magic plays prominent roles in our daily activities and it is one of the fundamental bedrocks upon which Yoruba fore-father built their faith. Despite the advent of both Islam and Christianity, magic still occupies an important position in our society up till today and whosever disregarded magic nowadays in the Yoruba setting, such a person is said to be dead but yet to be buried. Thus, miracles on the other hand could be traced to the New Testament of the Holy Bible and specifically it is associated majority with Christ and his fellowship.

Furthermore, miracle is an act of evoking wonders or alter even which does not follow the normal and natural events Jesus activities are centered round miracles and parables, but what majorly attracted crowd around him centered round the fact that he has a greater power to perform miracles more than any preceding leaders.

**A Scholarly Approach to Magic and Miracle**

Several works and definition have been advanced on the word "magic", the definitions are based on different perspectives upon which the word is viewed. Dopamu (2003) sees magic as the art of using the available resources of nature to procure non-therapeutic needs of man, either for good or for bad. From Dopamu's view one could infer that Magic and miracle are generally meant to have impact on men whether positively or negatively. Thus they are all necessary in the daily affairs of men. Furthermore he defines magic as the art of influencing course of events by means of Supernatural, communication and manifestation of power, or by means of occult control of nature and invocation of particular spirit aids. Zakovitch (2010) opines that Magic is performed by people namely by Professional practitioners of the art who are Capable of forcing their will upon creation and Creatures alike. Same vein, Cooper Wasserzizing (1981) defines "magic" as any art that invokes supernatural powers, while Hornsby Dictionary gives the

definition of “magic as pretended use of supernatural forces and arts of obtaining mysterious results by tricks”.

From the foregoing magic it has been established that magic is an act of influencing nature positively or negatively, with or through the use of supernatural power and this could be done by the professionals. However, it could be used to change events, situations and circumstances. The effects of such changes that took place could be either positive or negative, depending on the intention one desires to achieve. Biblical miracles are so numerous; both in the New and Old Testaments. The effects of miracles can never be underrated. Harold E. Remus defines miracle as “The expressions of God’s righteous governance of the world”. Also C.S Lewis (2004) defines miracle as:

*Something beyond man’s intellectual or scientific ability to accomplish. It is not natural, even though it may be unusual, a miracle is supernatural, it is more than a highly improbable event, it injects a new element into the natural order of things.*

In the same vein Alana suggests “miracle as event in the visible or physical world performed as a manifestation of the power of God”. However, miracles in the Bible were performed by God sometimes through His spokesmen such as Elijah and Elisha. Examples of such miracles in the Old Testament are the Burning bush and grass not consuming (Exodus 3), the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:24), Lot’s wife turned to pillar of salt (Gen 19:26), even the creation of the universe (Gen 1) etc. In the New Testament world, Jesus performed so many miracles and such miracles can be categorized thus; healing various diseases, driving out demon (exorcism), controlling the forces of nature and raising Lazarus from dead (John 11: 1-45). Jesus performed acts of healing on people who were suffering from various diseases and illness (Matt 9:35), the deaf and dumb, the blind (John 9:1-7), the lame (John 5:1-15), as well as those with fever, leprosy, epilepsy, paralysis (John 5:1-15). The greatest miracles of all were His resurrection from the dead.

In another dimension miracles could be described as an event in the external world brought about by the immediate agency or volition of God. Hence, miracle occurs to show that behind it, is not limited to the laws of matter or mind as it interrupts the laws. So the term supernatural applies quite accurately. Thus, miracle is anything amazing or a wonderful occurrence or a marvelous event manifesting a supernatural act of God. Looking at the above analysis of miracles by different authors or researchers and writers, it is certain that one particular thing that comes to revelation is the fact that it is an action or event that is beyond intellectual analysis or explanation of human understanding. However, it cannot be scientifically proved. It is a way of altering natural events (something that tends to prove the law of nature wrong that is miracle).

## **A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS MAGIC AND MIRACLE IN YORUBA RELIGION**

### **Similarities between Magic and Miracles**

According to Awolalu and Dopamu (2005), magic and medicine have many things in common. They are known by the same name among some ethnic groups, for example, the Yoruba call both *oogun* or *isegun*, the Nupe call them *agba*, the Igbo call them *ogwa* and Akan call them *summon*. However, Awolalu and Dopamu stressed further that both are controlled by the same divinity. Among the Yoruba, we have *Osanyin* and among the Igbo we have *Agwu* as the tutelary divinity of magic and medicine. However, the two concepts arose out of man’s urgent need. That is, both came into being as a result of man’s attempt to conquer his physical environment, diseases, enemies and natural phenomena. Furthermore, ritual is a common element in both magic and miracle. Using of blood is a common element in the scripture. It shows that, the blood at the lintels at the Israelites houses, while in Egypt, they escaped disaster. With the

blood, believers in Christ obtain salvation for their soul. The power of the mark of the either animals or human blood cannot be undervalued.

Another similarity in the two concepts is that there is the dynamic force backing them. Each event is brought about by the action of a powerful force without which none of the event could take place. Satan, spirits, divinities and demons are held and seen to be the active agents whose powers, invoked magical happenings. But, the mighty hand of the supreme God is seen behind miracles and also attested to, by the Holy Scripture. The spiritual state of each of the two concept opens us to another similarity in the events. However, it is the question of faith that the man of God has an unwavering belief that God is able to do what he requests. So, he remains unshaken in all challenges. Despite all odds, as in the case of Daniel and the three Hebrews, they believe God and hold faithfully to Him. The magician too, having met all requirement, has a strong belief that his goal will be obtained. However, after persistent waiting and demanding and failures, he still belief that the fault is not in the power but in his not observing one rite or thing properly. The individual receiver of miracles is many times very important determiner or divine interventions. In conjunction with the similar 'faith' exhibited in miracle, and magic the act of command is also brought out as another element which applies in the two concepts. Each event is brought about at the commands of each agent.

### **Differences between Magic and Miracles**

A miraculous event differentiates itself by being wholly the prerogative action of God. It is found to be God's act put in the hands of His own children. Magical events have been used to be at the dictates and control of man. No matter how consecrated the individual may be, he in his own self cannot make miracle to happen. God solely exercises the will to make it happen. So, the element of "my will" and "thy will" be done separates the two concepts. The above statements being true, it would be reasonable to assert that what is put under God's control would certainly have more beneficial result to man than what it held under man's control. Moral and doctrinal dimensions found in miracle acts also separate it from magic.

Miracle in all occasions has a moral or doctrinal message for man. Apart from revealing God and bringing Him glory, miracle events from amazement, no magical event stir up people to any moral uprightness. Neither is there any doctrinal teaching in it, as we find in miracles. Jesus raising miracle tells of his being the resurrection and the life. The healing of the blind, showing him as the bread of life. Therefore, no magic calls people to repentance or moral uprightness. Also, the repeatability of magic event differentiates if from miracle. While magical deeds can be brought about just at the every time dictates and desires of the magician, there is no guarantee that given similar situation the same event is bound to happen with miracles. It is observed that the magician goes from theatre to theatre repeating similar acts to the distraction of the audience. Such is not so with miracle, in lieu with the repeatability differences, miracle stands distinct from magic in that, it is not done for economic purpose or for profit.

However, God forbids the miracle agent to take anything from the people they help. They are God's benevolent act to man and it does not required to be paid for. When Gehazi, Elisha's servant greedily collected what Elisha his master had turned down after the healing of Naaman, he incurred the punishment for it (2 Kings 5:27). Magical works in either healing, preventing or otherwise is for commercial purpose. The magician renders help to people for money. Another important element that separates magic and miracle is the question of relapse, divine miracles. At least there are no records of any relapse miracle. When they are healing ones, they are perfect and complete. But some magic healings have relapses. The patients complain of the same treated ailments and many resort to going from magic center to another. The patients are treated in a way make them continually dependent on the healer. Hence relapse cases not found in miracle separate it from magic.

Another element that separates magic and miracle is the matter of checks and limitation. Miracle events cannot be counteracted by any other power neither can it be checked. The power of God cuts across every bound. The magical event or happening can be checked by a stronger power that is in opposition to what magical deeds hope to achieve.

### Conclusion

Miracles and magic can never be ruled out in the day-to-day affairs of men. Men do expect miracles in daily activities depending on their socio-cultural background and so also magic is also inevitable in the life of men. The two as revealed from Yoruba cultural background, may be considered related without much distinction between the two. The two intend to influence natural phenomena. There are forces upon which the two operate and sometimes beyond human understanding. In view of all these, miracles are generally believed to be from God, while men perform magic.

### Suggestions

Miracles and magical should complement each other. That is, they should have a common goal for the development of individuals in particular and the society in general. Magic should be used positively to drive out evil spirits and to cure diseases and some other ailments. In other words, magic should not be used negatively to harm one another. The two concepts, (magic and miracle) should be entrenched in school curriculum so that students would have proper knowledge of them. In that way, their values and heritage can be preserved for prosperity. Further, church ministers, evangelists and pastors should take more seriously their mandate to heal and exorcise (Mark 16:17-18), so that their members will be helped in times of troubles. This means that prayer and ministries should be encouraged. Finally, government should give more recognition to out medicine-men so that most of the diseases that could be cured with only modern medicine will be cured by medicine-men or herbalists who would come to such individual's aid.

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