The Disenchantment of Magic: Spells, Charms, and Superstition in Early European Witchcraft Literature

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In 1917, in a lecture in Munich on "Science as a Vocation," Max Weber first articulated his notion of "the disenchantment of the world," later also incorporated into his seminal *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. He presented disenchantment as a hallmark feature of modern Western society, which had come into full vigor with the Protestant Reformation. Initially Weber described this development, in relation to science, as entailing primarily the conviction that "there are no mysterious incalculable forces" and that "one need no longer have recourse to magical means in order to master or implore spirits." Later, and rather more evocatively in relation to religion, he described it as a historical force that had progressively "repudiated all magical means to salvation as superstition and sin."[1] Weber's assertions were hardly uncontroversial, and they have been challenged repeatedly in the century since they were first made.[2] Nevertheless, the basic notion of disenchantment remains very influential on many academic disciplines' understanding of the modern world. Magic and cultural perceptions of the magical occupy a critical place particularly in sociological and anthropological conceptions of modernity, and issues of "magical thought" and "superstition" in opposition to "scientific rationalism" frame discussions not only of the modern West but of instances in which Western modernity confronts the traditional beliefs and practices of other world cultures.[3]

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[1] Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation," in H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds. and trans., *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York, 1946), 129–156, quotes from 139; Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (1930; repr., London, 1992), 61. On the dating of the Munich speech, see Wolfgang Schluchter, "Excursus: The Question of Dating of 'Science as a Vocation' and 'Politics as a Vocation,' " in Guenther Roth and Wolfgang Schluchter, eds., *Max Weber's Vision of History: Ethics and Methods* (Berkeley, Calif., 1979), 113–116.

[2] A succinct critique of the use of "disenchantment" to frame modernity is found in Owen Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1975), 258.

[3] Peter Pels, "Introduction: Magic and Modernity," in Birgit Meyer and Peter Pels, eds., *Magic and Modernity: Interfaces of Revelation and Concealment* (Stanford, Calif., 2003), 1–38, discussion of Weber on 26–29. Randall Styers, *Making Magic: Religion, Magic, and Science in the Modern World* (Oxford, 2004), offers a cogent account of how discourses of magic, especially scholarly ones, are employed to fashion modernity. On the centrality of disenchantment, he notes that all "dominant [modern] theories of magic have as their objective an insistence that the modern subject conform to an emphatic disen-

Historians of European magic and witchcraft have also engaged, sometimes overtly but often tacitly, with the themes Weber identified and encapsulated as "disenchantment." Keith Thomas in particular, in his groundbreaking *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, made only passing reference to Weber directly but took up the essentially Weberian theme of the degree to which religion (of the more modern, reformed variety) displaced magic from European society. Far from eliminating all magic in the world, however, Thomas concluded that by eradicating the "magical" practices of the medieval church, Protestantism in England actually promoted concern about witches and popular reliance on cunning folk, astrologers, and other types of common magicians.[4] Following this line of argument, historians have since pushed generalized disenchantment back to progressively later points in European history—the Scientific Revolution, the Enlightenment, even nineteenth-century industrialization. Most recently, historians of the modern period have begun to engage directly with, and further problematize, Weber's analysis by arguing that certain magical beliefs and systems of thought not only endured into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries but were in fact essential elements of European modernity.[5]

An underlying issue plaguing any attempt, save perhaps for the modern period, to historically examine key issues entailed in disenchantment—the emergence of putatively purer "modern" religious sensibilities compatible with scientific rationalism out of earlier, supposedly muddled "magical" systems—is the fact, now widely recognized, that the categories of "religion" and "magic" in their current forms are almost entirely creations of the post-Reformation era.[6] Some historians of early modern Europe, however, now present an at least quasi-Weberian analysis of certain shifts toward more modern mentalities in the area of ritual during that period. They have also returned to locating the critical force behind these shifts in the Reformation. Protestant authorities, they contend, largely abandoned the view that real efficacy or presence of power was inherent in ritual acts and began to assert the notion of ritual as mere symbolic signification or representation. This process was most clearly evident in Protestant sacramental and above all eucharistic theology,

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chantment" (13). Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (Oxford, 1997), 177–178, notes Weber's "lingering influence" on most modern typologies of religion, magic, and ritual. Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, Calif., 2003), states that disenchantment remains "a salient feature of the modern epoch" (13), even while later calling the interpretive value of the term into some question (48). For an example of the interrelation of magic and modernity outside the West, see Gyan Prakash, "Between Science and Superstition: Religion and the Modern Subject of the Nation in Colonial India," in Meyer and Pels, *Magic and Modernity*, 39–59.

[4] Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York, 1971), esp. 25–112.

[5] R. W. Scribner, "The Reformation, Popular Magic, and the 'Disenchantment of the World,'" *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 23, no. 3 (1993): 475–494, reprinted in Scribner, *Religion and Culture in Germany (1400–1800)*, ed. Lyndal Roper (Leiden, 2001), 346–365; Roy Porter, "Witchcraft and Magic in Enlightenment, Romantic, and Liberal Thought," in Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark, eds., *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (Philadelphia, Pa., 1999), 191–282, esp. 255–273. Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago, 2004), esp. 10–11 on the centrality of Weberian disenchantment for studies of modern European magic.

[6] Styers, *Making Magic*, 25–68; Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, *Magic, Science, Religion, and the Scope of Rationality* (Cambridge, 1990), 4–24. Rich discussion of some of the issues and implications inherent in this development can be found in Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore, Md., 1993), esp. 1–54; also Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, esp. 21–66.

but it also played out in many areas of ritualized activity.[7] While there is no denying the significance of the Reformation in terms of ritual and more general religious developments in European history, there is also considerable danger in positing a single period of relatively sudden, dramatic change, especially when the modern analytical categories employed are largely rooted in Reformation-era debates.[8]

In regard to historical conceptions of magic, shifting notions about the inherent qualities of various kinds of ritualized, magical actions need to be disentangled from the immediate context of the Reformation. In the century prior to the eruption of Protestantism, reformist impulses already animated many clerical authorities, feeding increased concern about proper religiosity, lay piety, and putative superstition.[9] A number of these authorities became particularly troubled by the common spells, charms, healing rites, and other simple ritualized acts widely used by laypeople and also by many clerics.[10] Fearing that these rites entailed at least tacit invocation of demons, authorities judged them to be erroneous and therefore superstitious. In this they followed long-standing Christian conceptions of the potentially demonic nature of virtually all magic. New this time, however, was the degree to which established theories were applied to questions of common practice and belief, and the level of concern these practices now generated. The first half of the fifteenth century, in particular, saw a rash of tracts and treatises produced on the question of superstition.[11] Here, however, the focus is on the treatment of common spells and charms in early witchcraft literature.

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[7] Edward Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1997), 147–223, with discussion of Weber's influence on 185–186.

[8] Philippe Buc, *The Dangers of Ritual: Between Early Medieval Texts and Social Scientific Theory* (Princeton, N.J., 2001), 164–247, offers a bracing critique of how modern conceptions of "ritual" and "religion" developed in the Reformation and post-Reformation eras.

[9] Francis Oakley, *The Western Church in the Later Middle Ages* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1979), 213–259, remains an excellent introduction; also Euan Cameron, *The European Reformation* (Oxford, 1991), esp. 38–48. More recently, see Christopher M. Bellitto, *Renewing Christianity: A History of Church Reform from Day One to Vatican II* (New York, 2001), esp. 102–118; Scott H. Hendrix, *Recultivating the Vineyard: The Reformation Agendas of Christianization* (Louisville, Ky., 2004), esp. 1–35. More focused is Krzysztof Bracha, "Kritik an den Glaubens- und Verhaltensformen und an der Aberglaubenpraxis im kirchlichen reformatorischen Schrifttum des Spätmittelalters," in Paweł Kras and Wojciech Polak, eds., *Christianity in East Central Europe: Late Middle Ages* (Lublin, 1999), 271–282; and Bracha, "Der Einfluß der neuen Frömmigkeit auf die spätmittelatlerliche Kritik am Aberglauben im Reformschrifttum Mitteleuropas," in Marek Derwich and Martial Staub, eds., *Die "Neue Frommigkeit" in Europa im Spätmittelalter* (Göttingen, 2004), 225–248.

[10] On this "common tradition" of magic in the Middle Ages, see Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1989), 56–80; Karen Jolly, "Medieval Magic: Definitions, Beliefs, Practices," in Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark, eds., *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, 2002), 3–71, 30–53.

[11] For an overview focused mainly on influential Latin treatises, see Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, 8 vols. (New York, 1923–1958), 4: 274–307; Françoise Bonney, "Autour de Jean Gerson: Opinions de théologiens sur les superstitions et la sorcellerie au début du XVe siècle," *Le Moyen Age* 77 (1971): 85–98; Jan R. Veenstra, *Magic and Divination at the Courts of Burgundy and France: Text and Context of Laurens Pignon's "Contre les devineurs" (1411)* (Leiden, 1998), 137–153; Werner Tschacher, *Der Formicarius des Johannes Nider von 1437/38: Studien zu den Anfängen der europäischen Hexenverfolgungen im Spätmittelalter* (Aachen, 2000), 269–291. On the numerous German vernacular catechetical texts dealing with superstition from this period, see Karin Baumann, *Aberglaube für Laien: Zur Programmatik und Überlieferung spätmittelalterlicher Superstitionenkritik*, 2 vols. (Würzburg, 1989). For Spain, see Fabián Alejandro Campagne, *Homo Catholicus, Homo Superstitiosus: El discurso antisupersticioso en la España de los siglos XV a XVIII* (Madrid, 2002). On a single major treatise, that of the Heidelberg theologian Nicholas Magni of Jauer, see Adolph Franz, *Der Magister Nikolaus Magni de Jawor: Ein Beitrag zur Literatur- und Gelehrtengeschichte des 14. und 15. Jahrhunderts* (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1898), 151–195. Those who read Polish (I do not) should also consult Krzysztof Bracha,

As important studies by Stuart Clark and Walter Stephens on late medieval and early modern witchcraft treatises have shown, authorities often deployed the idea of witchcraft as a tool for dealing with basic ontological and epistemological problems of their age.[12] They employed this concept at least partially to resolve dilemmas of uncertainty raised by common spells and other ritual acts. By the early fifteenth century, witchcraft connoted far more—for authorities, at least—than just the performance of simple malevolent magic (*maleficium*). Witches were now constructed as surrendering themselves entirely to demons, entering into pacts with them, and worshiping them as members of diabolical sects that gathered secretly to devour babies, desecrate sacraments, partake in sexual orgies, and perform terrible rites.[13] The explicit (and horrific) association of witches with demons removed all doubt about the essential nature of their acts. In establishing witchcraft as clearly diabolical in nature, authorities were particularly concerned to strip any effective agency from the simple ritual acts that witches employed. The words witches uttered or the gestures they performed could not directly cause magical effects; nor did these formulas have inherent power to bind or compel demons to cause those effects. Rather, witches' access to and control over demonic power was made to rest entirely on an explicit pact with Satan.

In addressing witchcraft and explicating both the nature of witches' power and the rites by which they might appear to work that power, authorities were also obliged to address the nature of many common healing and protective rites, both official ceremonies and formally approved practices as well as more fully popular improvisations often derived from these—those rites of power that Keith Thomas evocatively, although anachronistically, labeled the "magic of the medieval church," and which David Gentilcore more accurately described as constituting a complex "system of the sacred" that permeated premodern European society.[14] As with witchcraft, authorities again denied any real effect to rites themselves. True agency was either covertly demonic (a frightful possibility) or legitimately divine. Even more than demons, however, divinity could never be compelled or coerced by human acts. Thus ritual forms again became meaningless; so long as intent was good and proper faith was maintained, God should respond. Yet not only did this fly in the face of widespread common beliefs that perceived many church rites, as well as spells and charms based on them, to be automatically efficacious, but it also could be thought to undermine a critical point that witchcraft theorists sought to make: that people should

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Teolog, diabeł i zabobony: Świadectwo traktatu Mikołaja Magni z Jawora De superstitionibus (1405 r.) (Warsaw, 1999).

[12] Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford, 1997); Walter Stephens, *Demon Lovers: Witchcraft, Sex, and the Crisis of Belief* (Chicago, 2002).

[13] Focused studies on this period are Andreas Blauert, *Frühe Hexenverfolgungen: Ketzer-, Zauberei- und Hexenprozesse des 15. Jahrhunderts* (Hamburg, 1989); Martine Ostorero, *"Folâtrer avec les demons": Sabbat et chasse aux sorciers à Vevey (1448)* (Lausanne, 1995); Ostorero, Agostino Paravicini Bagliani, and Kathrin Utz Tremp, eds., *L'imaginaire du sabbat: Edition critique des textes les plus anciens (1430 c.–1440 c.)* (Lausanne, 1999).

[14] Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 25–50; David Gentilcore, *From Bishop to Witch: The System of the Sacred in Early Modern Terra d'Otranto* (Manchester, 1992). A strongly Weberian reading of this system is Lutz Kaelber, *Schools of Asceticism: Ideology and Organization in Medieval Religious Communities* (University Park, Pa., 1998), 101–125.

eschew questionable rites, even if their intent was good, and employ only the long-approved rituals of the church.

Theorists of witchcraft did not resolve these dilemmas in the course of the fifteenth century. Indeed, as the literature on witchcraft grew more developed and thorough, the problems of properly understanding and categorizing common spells and charms became more complex. Not only did authorities frequently seem to maintain the virtually automatic effectiveness of official ceremonies, but even the most severe opponents of witchcraft still argued for the permissibility of various unofficial rites. Issues of the effectiveness, and appropriateness, of spells and charms, church ceremonies, and sacramentals, as well as the sacraments themselves, continued well into the early modern period.[15] Arguably the two greatest monuments of fifteenth-century witchcraft literature were Johannes Nider's *Formicarius* [Anthill], the most extensive and influential of several early tracts and treatises on witchcraft produced in the 1430s, and Heinrich Kramer's *Malleus maleficarum* [Hammer of Witches], the most important late medieval witchcraft treatise, written in 1486.[16] Both men were members of the Dominican order, which was famous for its pastoral and inquisitorial activities and was in each of these roles deeply involved in investigating and shaping common beliefs and practices.[17] Both were also largely conservative in their thought, grounded in the Thomism of the thirteenth century rather than newer intellectual systems such as nominalism that were developing in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Thus they indicate how growing concerns over spells, charms, and potential witchcraft were rooted in long-established interpretations of Christian belief. Moreover, the two men shared a direct connection, as Kramer drew heavily from and expanded upon Nider's earlier accounts.[18]

Although these works were written in the fifteenth century and reflect a particular strain of thought within that century, insights derived from careful attention to this material carry broad implications for how historians and scholars in other disciplines conceive and periodize a major aspect of Western Europe's development toward modernity. Processes identifiable as "disenchantment"—notably the conceptualization of much magical and religious ritual as merely symbolic rather than directly effective—were evident already in the fifteenth century, and indeed earlier, and thus nothing like Weber's "disenchantment of the world" or any concomitant lurch toward modernity should be bound exclusively to the impact of the Reformation. Critically, locating some "disenchantment" prior to the Reformation helps to decouple these processes from modern conceptions of "magic" and "religion" that are products of Reformation-era debates. They are instead revealed to be deeply enmeshed with medieval Christian beliefs about the nature of superhuman powers, whether those of demons or of divinity, and the means by which human beings might interact with, supplicate, or attempt to direct such power.[19] Yet the tensions and uncertainty regarding this interaction evident in fifteenth-century witchcraft treatises, and especially in their treatment of spells, charms, and other superstitions, reveal a heightened concern with these issues and indicate much of the manner in which they would continue to provoke and inform debate throughout the Reformation and at least until the Enlightenment.[20] The fifteenth century was therefore an important connecting juncture between "medieval" and "early modern" concerns, and the disenchantment it reveals was not a sudden break with or rejection of earlier magical thought, but a development within it that illuminates continuing concern and debate over magical operations into the modern era.

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[15] See Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*; Gentilcore, *From Bishop to Witch*; and several essential articles collected in R. W. Scribner, *Popular Culture and Popular Movements in Reformation Germany* (London, 1987), 1–16, 17–47, 257–275, and Scribner, *Religion and Culture*, 275–365.

[16] On Nider, see Tschacher, *Der Formicarius*; Michael D. Bailey, *Battling Demons: Witchcraft, Heresy, and Reform in the Late Middle Ages* (University Park, Pa., 2003). On the *Malleus*, see Günter Jerouschek and Wolfgang Behringer, " 'Das unheilvollste Buch der Weltliteratur'? Zur Entstehung- und Wirkungsgeschichte des Malleus Maleficarum und zu den Anfängen der Hexenverfolgung," in Günter Jerouschek and Wolfgang Behringer, eds., *Der Hexenhammer: Malleus Maleficarum* (Munich, 2000), 9–98; Hans Peter Broedel, *The Malleus Maleficarum and the Construction of Witchcraft: Theology and Popular Belief* (Manchester, 2003). Although traditionally Jakob Sprenger is listed as coauthor with Kramer, there is strong evidence that Kramer was the chief, probably the sole, author. See Peter Segl, "Heinrich Institoris: Persönlichkeit und literarisches Werk," in Peter Segl, ed., *Der Hexenhammer: Entstehung und Umfeld des Malleus maleficarum von 1487* (Cologne, 1988), 103–126; Jerouschek and Behringer, "Das unheilvollste Buch," 31–37.

[17] On the interrelation of these roles, see Christine Caldwell, "Dominican Inquisitors as 'Doctors of Souls': The Spiritual Discipline of Inquisition, 1231–1331," *Heresis* 40 (2004): 23–40; also Christine Caldwell Ames, "Does Inquisition Belong to Religious History?" *AHR* 110, no. 1 (February 2005): 11–37, esp. 17–24.

[18] Tschacher, *Der Formicarius*, 22; Jerouschek and Behringer, "Das unheilvollste Buch," 13; Broedel, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, 21.

WHEN CONFRONTING COMMON SPELLS AND CHARMS, or any other potential superstition, clerical authorities in the fifteenth century, as throughout the Middle Ages, were concerned above all to correct errors and provide clarity, for in the theological parlance of this period, superstition entailed improper belief and improperly understood ritual acts.[21] Yet whatever efforts authorities made to define superstition in the abstract, the often ambiguous nature of actual practice eluded their attempts at certain categorization. They were aware of, and deeply concerned about, these ambiguities, which touched on profound tensions within essential issues of Christian belief, namely the ways in which humans could, and could not, interact with supernatural forces, demonic or divine, and the real meaning of the ritual forms in which that interaction was frequently cloaked.[22] The category of witchcraft, as constructed by authorities at this time, allowed them to define a number of malevolent magical practices as definitively demonic (all witchcraft, in this sense, was inherently superstitious, although not all superstition was necessarily witchcraft). The intense diabolism that informed authorities' developing concept of witchcraft entailed the strong denial of any possible direct effectiveness in the spells or other ritualized performances of witches. Convinced that the power of demons lay behind all acts of witchcraft, clerical authorities worked aggressively to promulgate this point and to disabuse the common laity of any notions to the contrary.[23]

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[19] On antique conceptions of such interaction, see Dale B. Martin, *Inventing Superstition: From the Hippocratics to the Christians* (Cambridge, Mass., 2004).

[20] A detailed study of the concept of superstition in the context of Protestant thought is Ernst Saxer, *Aberglaube, Heuchelei und Frömmigkeit: Eine Untersuchung zu Calvins reformatorischer Eigenart* (Zurich, 1970). On superstition into the Enlightenment, see William Monter, *Ritual, Myth, and Magic in Early Modern Europe* (Athens, Ohio, 1983); Martin Pott, *Aufklärung und Aberglaube: Die deutsche Frühaufklärung im Spiegel ihrer Aberglaubenskritik* (Tübingen, 1992). While Monter links superstition to the issue of witchcraft, Pott exposes Enlightenment thinkers' reliance on classical descriptions of *superstitio* and especially *deisidaimonia* (esp. chaps. 2–3).

[21] Virtually all late medieval authorities followed the definition of *superstitio* given in the thirteenth century by Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 2.2.92.1–2, in *Summa theologiae: Latin Text and English Translation*, vol. 40: *Superstition and Irreverence*, ed. and trans. Thomas Franklin O'Meara and Michael John Duffy (New York, 1968), 2–8. On the origins and earlier use of the term, see Dieter Harmening, *Superstitio: Überlieferungs- und theoriegeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur kirchlich-theologischen Aberglaubensliteratur des Mittelalters* (Berlin, 1979). Baumann, *Aberglaube*, 1: 260, indicates late medieval authorities' heavy reliance on earlier scholastic and patristic authors.

[22] On medieval conceptions of the supernatural, and the distinct category of the preternatural, see Fabián Alejandro Campagne, "Witchcraft and the Sense-of-the-Impossible in Early Modern Spain: Some Reflections Based on the Literature of Superstition (ca. 1500–1800)," *Harvard Theological Review* 96, no. 1 (2002): 25–62. Here I intend "supernatural" in the commonly understood modern sense, not the technical medieval one.

Johannes Nider's *Formicarius* includes a story that illustrates the confusion surrounding common spells that so concerned authorities, and their deployment of the concept of diabolical witchcraft to achieve clarity. Although Nider assured his readers of the absolute veracity of all the examples he presented in this work,[24] the tale is too perfect, and may well have been entirely invented. Nevertheless, it encapsulates Nider's vision of the dangers inherent in commonly used spells and charms, and the message of warning he sought to impart. Sometime in the 1430s, in the southern German diocese of Constance, a man suffering from an injury to his foot visited a friend, a laywoman skilled in healing. Nider named her "Seriosa," so we will call her Ernestine here. She was not the first source of relief to which this man had turned. Believing that witches had caused his injury, he had tried numerous cures, including some remedies that church authorities deemed illicit, yet nothing could overcome the initial bewitchment. At last he came to his friend for help. She made the sign of the cross over him, whispered certain words, and immediately his foot was healed.[25] Impressed by her power, yet not recognizing how she had actually cured him, he asked what "incantations" she had used. At this point the acerbic Ernestine began to chide her friend: "Whether from weak faith or feebleness," she addressed him severely, "you don't adhere to the holy and approved rites of the church, and you often use spells and forbidden remedies to heal yourself." Such spells drew on the power of demons, she warned, and while they might sometimes cure his physical injuries, they always damaged his immortal soul.[26]

This is a story rife with uncertainty. The injured man appears sure that he was bewitched, but we are not told how he knows this. Various means were available in late medieval society for determining when witchcraft was present, and there were a range of popular experts, witch doctors, and cunning folk who could identify witches. These practices, too, were full of uncertainty, and—given the strife that could arise once accusations of witchcraft began to circulate within a community—fraught with danger.[27] While the man was certain of the cause of his suffering, he had no clear idea how to rectify his situation, trying a number of illicit cures, the "spells and forbidden remedies" of further witchcraft. Only when these failed did he finally turn to his friend Ernestine.[28] Uncertainty persisted, however, as he did not realize, or properly recognize, what she did for him. She cured him by making the sign of the cross and silently saying the Creed and the Lord's Prayer, yet he assumed that she had performed some spell or incantation. She then informed him, in no uncertain terms, of the actual nature of the power she had employed, of the condemned nature of the cures to which he had turned in the past, and of the spiritual harm he had suffered as a result.

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[23] The clearest study of the imposition of elite concerns about diabolism onto more common concerns about *maleficium* in the late medieval period remains Richard Kieckhefer, *European Witch Trials: Their Foundations in Popular and Learned Culture, 1300–1500* (Berkeley, Calif., 1976).

[24] Johannes Nider, *Formicarius*, ed. G. Colvener (Douai, 1602), prologue (unpaginated).

[25] Ibid. 5.4, 356–357.

[26] "Tunc statim infirmus curatum se sentiens, scire voluit in remedium futurorum quid carminationis virgo applicasset. Quae respondit: Vos, mala fide vel debili, diuinis et approbatis exercitiis ecclesiae non inheretis, et carmina ac remedia prohibita crebro vestris infirmitatibus applicatis; idcirco raro in corpore et semper in anima per talia laedimini." Ibid., 357.

[27] Robin Briggs, *Witches and Neighbors: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft* (New York, 1996), 169–218; Owen Davies, *Cunning-Folk: Popular Magic in English History* (London, 2003), 62–65, 111–112.

In correcting her friend, Ernestine was made to stand in for theorists of witchcraft and other witch-hunting authorities, a fact that carries significant irony, since if she did in fact represent a real person living in the early fifteenth century, she almost certainly would have been a local healer or cunning woman and would have run some risk of being identified as a witch herself.[29] Yet in the text, she was made to deliver with confident certainty a basic message that Nider and other theorists of witchcraft sought to convey regarding the spectrum of spells and charms available in late medieval Europe: that many of those rites were in fact diabolical witchcraft as authorities understood and constructed it. Witches could cure illness, heal, and relieve suffering, but all their acts, regardless of effect, were inherently evil because the operative power behind them was demonic.[30] Authorities were deeply concerned that people who believed themselves to be bewitched in some way not turn to further witchcraft for relief. As Nider stressed in *Formicarius*, "rather a person should die than agree to such things."[31]

Witchcraft theorists were obsessed with the notion that the laity tolerated and actively patronized practitioners of common magic, who were, in their perception, witches. By submitting to the devil, worshiping demons, and engaging in diabolical sabbaths, witches damned themselves, and by performing *maleficium* they harmed others; but perhaps their foulest act, in the minds of clerical authorities, was that by deceiving others about the true nature of witchcraft and tempting them into seeking the aid of witches, they corrupted innocent Christian souls. Horrific images of debased carnality and uncontrolled aggression, especially toward infants, proliferated in treatises on witchcraft, as well as in sermons and other forms of propaganda about witches. These served to cast witchcraft emphatically as the inversion of all proper moral order and to warn people against any toleration of suspected demonic activities in their midst.[32] Most laypeople surely understood at least the basic nature of demonic menace as the church depicted it. They did not, however, seem to connect familiar practices with this menace, or they viewed possible involvement with demons far less seriously than did clerics. Common discourse about interactions with supernatural or occult forces typically reflected care and hesitancy about engaging with such power, but also some casualness, evidenced by claims that most laypeople did not well or fully understand the specific nature of the operations involved or the powers invoked.[33] According to the early-fifteenth-century Franciscan preacher Bernardino of Siena, for example, the entire city of Siena stood in peril because of its citizens' unconcerned acceptance of the many "witches" known to inhabit the region.[34]

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[28] Gentilcore, *From Bishop to Witch*, 259, describes how recourse to multiple forms of supernatural aid was quite common.

[29] On the relationship of cunning folk to accused witches, see Briggs, *Witches and Neighbors*, 122–123; Davies, *Cunning-Folk*, 2–17; Willem de Blécourt, "Witch Doctors, Soothsayers and Priests: On Cunning Folk in European Historiography and Tradition," *Social History* 19, no. 3 (1994): 285–303, esp. 288–296.

[30] Nider, *Formicarius* 5.3, 352, and 5.6, 371; Nider, *Preceptorium divine legis* 1.11.x (Milan, 1489) (no pagination).

[31] "Immo potius homo mori deberet quam talia consentire." Nider, *Formicarius* 5.3, 352–351 (misnumbered for 353).

[32] On witchcraft and infanticide, see Richard Kieckhefer, "Avenging the Blood of Children: Anxiety over Child Victims and the Origins of the European Witch Trials," in Alberto Ferreiro, ed., *The Devil, Heresy and Witchcraft in the Middle Ages: Essays in Honor of Jeffrey B. Russell* (Leiden, 1998), 91–109. On carnality, the fullest consideration is now Stephens, *Demon Lovers* (although I think he overemphasizes the centrality of demonic sex in intellectual constructions of witchcraft). Stuart Clark, in "Inversion, Misrule and the Meaning of Witchcraft," *Past and Present* 87 (1980): 98–127, and more fully in *Thinking with Demons*, has demonstrated how essential the notion of inversion was to the concept of witchcraft.

To clarify and justify their concerns, authorities stressed supposedly direct evidence of the diabolism that witchcraft entailed. For example, in his *Buch aller verbotenen Künste* [Book of All Forbidden Arts], the German courtier Johannes Hartlieb claimed to have personally uncovered such diabolism. In 1447, he was ordered by the duke of Bavaria to investigate a woman who supposedly professed the ability to summon storms and hail, one of the major evils attributed to witches in southern German and alpine lands. Under his questioning, she admitted that, to obtain this power, she had denied God, Mary, and all the saints, as well as her baptism and the other sacraments, and that she had given herself "life and soul" to three devils. Thereafter, she needed only to call these devils, and they would raise hailstorms wherever she desired.[35] Johannes Nider, too, presented an account of a (male) witch who directly confirmed the demonic nature of his powers, also with reference to storm-raising. Captured by authorities, he confessed that he would go with an accomplice to an open field and there implore the "prince of all demons," the devil, to send a lesser demon. The witch would immolate a black fowl at a crossroads and throw it into the air as an offering, and the demon would then cause hail and lightning to strike at his command.[36]

Like Ernestine, the woman in Hartlieb's account spoke to confirm the message that authorities sought to impart. As for Nider's weather-working witch, he supposedly confessed to a magistrate who had captured him, who then reported this story to Nider. Assuming that Nider did not simply invent the tale or recast it wholesale in his retelling, certainly the judge could have extracted a confession that suited his own purposes as an authority bent on stressing the demonic nature of much common magic.[37] Interestingly, elsewhere in *Formicarius*, Nider related how this same witch supposedly prevented a married couple from having children over the course of several years. In this account, no overt diabolism was present; the man cast the spell simply by burying a lizard under the threshold of the couple's dwelling, although since the accused in this case had already been deemed a witch, Nider was certain that demonic power was somehow in operation.[38] Amid the doubt and confusion that authorities seem to have faced, and which they certainly feared, regarding the nature of many common magical practices, the figure of the witch, forced either in reality or in exemplary accounts to confess the explicitly demonic basis of her (or sometimes his) power, was made to be reassuringly definitive.

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[33] Bengt Ankarloo, "Witch Trials in Northern Europe, 1450–1700," in Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark, eds., *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Period of the Witch Trials* (Philadelphia, Pa., 2002), 53–95, 58.

[34] A translation of the sermon appears in John Shinners, ed., *Medieval Religion, 1000–1500: A Reader* (Orchard Park, N.Y., 1997), 242–245; original Italian in Bernardino da Siena, *Prediche volgari sul Campo di Siena, 1427*, ed. Carlo Delcorno, 2 vols. (Milan, 1989), 2: 1002–1040. Nider knew of and admired Bernardino; *Formicarius* 4.9, 311–312. On Bernardino and witchcraft generally, see Franco Mormando, *The Preacher's Demons: Bernardino of Siena and the Social Underworld of Early Renaissance Italy* (Chicago, 1999), 52–108.

[35] Johannes Hartlieb, *Das Buch aller verbotenen Künste, des Aberglaubens und der Zauberei*, ed. and trans. Falk Eckhard Graf (Ahlerstedt, 1989), 46–48.

[36] Nider, *Formicarius* 5.4, 358. Although he was the earliest authority to address the frequent association of witchcraft with women, Nider often related examples of male witches. See Michael D. Bailey, "The Feminization of Magic and the Emerging Idea of the Female Witch in the Late Middle Ages," *Essays in Medieval Studies* 19 (2002): 120–134; Bailey, *Battling Demons*, 48–52.

THE PRESENCE OF DEMONIC POWER behind most forms of magic was a long-established fact in Christian thought, deriving from the earliest church fathers.[39] Late medieval witchcraft theorists simply stressed this point in the face of perceived common uncertainty or lack of proper understanding. Yet in their discussions of the power behind magical acts, they also had to define how humans could access and manipulate that power. Here too they addressed, in an even more nuanced way, the function and real effect of the rites involved. And here too they removed from ritual actions, however complex or simple, any direct operative power. Such a conclusion was relatively unproblematic when applied to witchcraft or other magical actions that authorities sought to denigrate and condemn, but matters became more complicated when authorities turned to approved ecclesiastical or other rites that they wished to valorize, or at least not vilify. While they still maintained that rites had no inherent operative or directive force, they were nevertheless deeply concerned that the proper forms of these rites be maintained, for improper forms could entail dangerous superstition.

Even when it was agreed that "magic" functioned through demonic power, how did a spell draw on that power? Common people either thought little about such issues or found it expedient to claim disinterested ignorance when questioned by authorities. Learned clerics, however, pondered the matter at length, and not just those who sought to condemn magical practices. Medieval necromancers, learned and literate magicians who were mostly clerics, practiced complex forms of ritual magic and readily admitted to invoking and exploiting demonic power.[40] They maintained, however, that they were in no way subservient to demons, but commanded and compelled them by virtue of the powerful rituals they employed. Most clerical authorities argued strongly against this position, claiming that any invocation of demons involved some degree of supplication and implied at least a tacit pact.[41] Witchcraft theorists, focusing on the very simple rites of common magic, stressed explicit pacts that were necessarily prior to any magical activity. In 1437, the same year Nider wrote much of his *Formicarius*, Pope Eugenius IV issued a statement on witchcraft in a directive to papal inquisitors, declaring that witches worshiped demons and entered into formal, often written pacts with them "so that by a single word, touch, or sign they might perform whatever harmful magic they desire."[42] Similarly, Nider recounted how witches might raise storms by stirring water with a broom. This action had no direct effect, either to raise the storm or to compel demons to do so. Rather, demons responded to this sign because of binding pacts that had existed between them and witches since time immemorial.[43]

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[37] On ways in which Nider may have reinterpreted earlier reports, see Blauert, *Frühe Hexenverfolgungen*, 57–59.

[38] Nider, *Formicarius* 5.3, 350.

[39] The most influential patristic treatment of demons was that given by Augustine, chiefly in his *De doctrina christiana*, *De divinatione daemonum*, and *De civitate dei*, esp. books 8–10. Thomas Linsenmann, *Die Magie bei Thomas von Aquin* (Berlin, 2000), devotes several chapters to the Augustinian background of Aquinas's thought; see esp. 73–98.

[40] On medieval necromancy, see Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 151–175; more fully, Richard Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites: A Necromancer's Manual of the Fifteenth Century* (University Park, Pa., 1998).

In this way, witchcraft theorists radically disempowered the simple ritual actions involved in the performance of various kinds of common magic that they perceived to be diabolical witchcraft. Not only did these rites have no causative force, they had no necessary directive effect on the agents (demons) that did cause the magical result. They merely signified the witch's desire. Seeking always to argue that witches were utterly subservient to demons, authorities had every reason to denigrate and dismiss the simple rites that supposed witches performed. Matters necessarily became more complex, however, when authorities addressed various rites that they sought to validate and maintain. Aside from explicating the horrific nature of witchcraft itself, most theorists also sought to clarify how people might properly respond to the threat that witches represented. Certainly this was the case with Nider, whose *Formicarius* was mainly a collection of instructive stories, moral exempla intended for use in sermons delivered to the laity.[44] As noted already, he warned that under no circumstances should people have recourse to further witchcraft to remedy bewitchments. Instead, they should turn to the church and such remedies as prayer and penance, the sign of the cross, meditation on the passion of Christ, pious attendance at church rites and ceremonies, or pilgrimage to saints' shrines.[45]

While such approved rites often closely resembled magic spells and charms in their effects and even in their formulas, for medieval authorities the two systems were entirely distinct and dramatically opposed in the most important way possible. Prayers and approved blessings drew on divine power, while magic spells relied on demons.[46] Yet authorities treated both systems similarly in this sense: if the rites of witches played no part in compelling demons to respond, still less could sanctioned rites, although laudable, compel divine power. These rites, too, were merely signs. In some cases, notably the sacraments, God responded because of a covenant (or, in language that could appear shocking when surrounded by demonological arguments in treatises on magic, superstition, or witchcraft, a "pact") with the church.[47] More often he responded out of mercy, not because of the performance of some specific rite but because of the internal moral state of the person seeking divine help.[48] Nider, for example, related a long account of a secular judge, Peter of Bern, who conducted numerous witch trials in the early 1400s. He was immune to the power of the witches he hunted because he diligently protected himself with the sign of the cross, but more basically because he always "acted in good faith." One morning he failed to make the sign of the cross when he arose, and he was almost immediately struck down and injured by witchcraft. Nider explained, however, that Peter was wrathful that day, and may even have cursed in the name of the devil.[49] Thus his vulnerability to witchcraft was due to his spiritual state, not simply his failure to perform a ritual act.

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[41] The most influential authority in this regard was the late-fourteenth-century Catalan inquisitor Nicolau Eymeric. See Michael D. Bailey, "From Sorcery to Witchcraft: Clerical Conceptions of Magic in the Later Middle Ages," *Speculum* 76, no. 4 (2001): 960–990, 971–976.

[42] "[. . .] et in signum desuper chartam scriptam vel quid aliud tradunt, cum ipsis obligatoria, ut solo verbo, tactu vel signo malefica, quibus velint, illis inferant sive tollant [. . .]." In Joseph Hansen, ed., *Quellen und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Hexenwahns und der Hexenverfolgung im Mittelalter* (1901; repr., Hildesheim, 1963), 17.

[43] "De hoc etiam infra dicetur non autem faciunt ista immediate maleficorum opera actione propria et immediate, sed talia fiunt per demones qui uisis maleficiis immediate ex pacto dudum cum maleficis a principio mundi et tempore ueteris idolatrie habito sciunt qualem effectum debent ad intentionem maleficorum procurare. Ut exempla gratia: Scopa quam malefica intingit in aquam ut pluat non causat pluuiam, sed demon talibus visis qui, si deus permiserit, potestatem habet in omnia corporalia, et in aerem, uentos, et nubes, ut statim talia procuraret et causare ualeat. Maga siquidem signum dat per scopam, sed demon illud procurat et agit ut pluat per demonis actionem." Nider, *Preceptorium* 1.11.v.

[44] Bailey, *Battling Demons*, 99–101.

[45] Nider, *Formicarius* 5.4, 356, and 5.6, 370; also Nider, *Preceptorium* 1.11.x.

Nider made the unessential nature of even official ritual clear when he discussed exorcism as a means to counteract bewitchment.[50] Given that witchcraft functioned through the power of demons, many bewitchments could be undone by driving off the demons responsible for inflicting them. This was a power that Christ had promised to the apostles and all faithful Christians in the Gospels.[51] Nider made clear that even informal acts of exorcism performed with faith could be as effective as the formal church rite that clerics performed "ex officiis."[52] Such basic rejection of the essential importance of specific ritual forms probably contributed to authorities' willingness to countenance many unofficial rites used against witchcraft. Nider, for example, approved of such practices as ringing church bells to protect crops from storms.[53] He also accepted and essentially recommended in *Formicarius* a counter-rite revealed by a witch under interrogation. To disperse hailstorms raised by witchcraft, one could recite this formula: "I adjure you, hail and winds, by the three nails of Christ, which pierced the hands and feet of Christ, and by the four evangelists, Saints Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, that you should fall dissipated into water."[54]

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[46] The importance of the distinction is stressed by Richard Kieckhefer, "The Specific Rationality of Medieval Magic," *AHR* 99, no. 3 (June 1994): 813–836.

[47] Nicholas Magni of Jauer, *Tractatus de superstitionibus*, University of Pennsylvania, MS Codex 78, fol. 58r.

[48] Nider, *Preceptorium* 1.11.gg; based on Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 2.2.96.4, 80–84.

[49] Nider, *Formicarius* 5.7, 380–381. For a fuller account of Peter's witch-hunting activities, see Arno Borst, "The Origins of the Witch-Craze in the Alps," in Borst, *Medieval Worlds: Barbarians, Heretics, and Artists in the Middle Ages*, trans. Eric Hansen (Chicago, 1992), 101–122.

[50] Nider, *Formicarius* 5.6, 370; Nider, *Preceptorium* 1.11.x.

[51] Matthew 12:26–28, Luke 8:29 and 9:42.

[52] Nider, *Formicarius* 5.6, 372; also Nider, *Preceptorium* 1.11.nn. Heinrich Kramer drew a similar point in *Malleus maleficarum* 2.2.6, *Nachdruck des Erstdruckes von 1487 mit Bulle und Approbatio*, ed. Günter Jerouschek (Hildesheim, 1992), fols. 85v–86r.

[53] Nider, *Preceptorium* 1.11.pp; also Kramer, *Malleus maleficarum* 2.2.7, fol. 91r. On the protective power of church bells, see Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 31.

[54] "Adiuro vos, grandines et ventos, per tres Christi diuinos clauos qui Christi manus et pedes perforarunt, et per quatuor euangelistas sanctos Matthaeum, Marcum, Lucam, et Ioannem, ut in aqua resoluti descendatis." Nider, *Formicarius* 5.4, 358.

Christian thinkers had debated the significance of specific ritual directed toward an omnipotent and omniscient God since the earliest days of the church, and in the early medieval period, ecclesiastical officials had frequently accommodated themselves to unofficial and even pagan rites, so long as these were purged of any overtly demonic elements and were made to reflect Christian faith.[55] Thus the struggles of late medieval witchcraft theorists to come to terms with the nature and function of various rites must be understood as part of a long tradition running through Christian history, as well as the result of specific debates about the nature of common magical operations and the potential threat of superstition developing in the fifteenth century, largely in the context of witchcraft. Seeking to clarify the absolute demonic nature of witchcraft, authorities aggressively stripped all power from the simple rites performed by supposed witches. Against witchcraft they sought to recommend the power of official Christian rites such as prayer, blessings, or the sign of the cross. While they frequently stressed that formulaic rites could not compel divine power,[56] they certainly did not want to devalue these rituals to the extent they had the rites of witches. Authorities also accepted a number of unofficial rites or practices by which the faithful could counteract demonic witchcraft. Again their underlying position was that God responded to pious intent, not specific ritual formulas. Yet they remained deeply concerned about the particular forms these rites took, for while God responded to true faith, an improperly enacted ritual could allow demonic forces to intrude regardless of the intent of the person performing the rite.

The essential element that made any spell, charm, or other formula illegitimate and illicit, all authorities agreed, was the invocation of demonic rather than divine power. Yet such invocation could be tacit or unintended as well as express, making reliable judgments on particular practices difficult to render. This dilemma of discernment is evident in Nider's account of the lay healer Ernestine.[57] In his relation of events, Ernestine delivered a reassuringly confident categorization of what had taken place. The injured man initially sought relief through illicit means that imperiled his soul. Ernestine healed him using the divine power of prayer and the sign of the cross. Yet the man could not tell the difference. In fact, many common spells and charms incorporated the sign of the cross, along with other gestures and phrases drawn from official ecclesiastical rites, and even the explicitly demonic rituals of learned, necromantic magic might include liturgical elements.[58] Ernestine also employed the Creed and the Lord's Prayer, albeit spoken silently so that her friend was unaware of what she had said. A problem for authorities would have been to determine whether she fully understood her own words, and whether she had delivered them correctly in Latin. Even a slight change in a verbal formula, intentional or inadvertent, could corrupt a wholesome prayer into a demonic invocation.[59]

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[55] Most detailed is Valerie I. J. Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton, N.J., 1991), although Flint focuses too much on an oppositional dynamic between Christian and pagan practices that was probably not so strongly perceived by contemporaries. On this, see Karen Louise Jolly, *Popular Religion in Late Saxon England: Elf Charms in Context* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1996). See also Kieckhefer, "Specific Rationality," for criticism of Flint's inattention to the contemporary distinctions that were made regarding the nature of the power—divine or demonic—perceived to underlie different rites.

[56] Nider, *Preceptorium* 1.11.gg; also Nicholas Magni of Jauer, *De superstitionibus*, fol. 27r; Heinrich Kramer, *Malleus maleficarum* 2.2.6, fol. 86v. The ultimate source was Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 2.2.96.4.

[57] Discernment of demons and demonic activity in general was a major issue for late medieval authorities; see Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2003), 274–319. Caciola focuses more than I do on the nature of church control in these areas, especially its gendered quality, and she draws useful comparisons to witchcraft.

[58] On liturgical elements of common spells, best is Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400–1580* (New Haven, Conn., 1992), 266–287. On liturgical elements of necromancy, see Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 70–74, 160–161, 166–168; Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites*, 3, 13–17.

While late medieval witchcraft theorists frequently expounded the seemingly "disenchanted" view that ritualized actions lacked any real power to coerce or direct supernatural forces, they could not entirely abandon the notion that improper rites, or improperly performed rites, carried dire consequences. At one point in his writings, Nider discussed certain healing spells and charms commonly used by old women. He recognized that these procedures closely resembled approved blessings and exorcisms. Such actions, he concluded, were inherently legitimate and could readily be permitted to trained clerics, but among the uneducated laity the danger of error and demonic infiltration was too great to allow.[60] Here was a straightforward admission that rites seeking to call on divine power for permissible ends could be fatally corrupted if their forms were mangled. Here was also a straightforward response to such complications surrounding conceptions of ritual practice—deploying the coercive power of the church to restrict to itself all such activity. This was a course increasingly taken in the fifteenth and subsequent centuries. Yet the uncertain status of ritual power persisted. As theories of witchcraft became more developed, the confusion would only grow more pronounced.

Malleus maleficarum was the most extended and influential treatise on witchcraft composed in the fifteenth century. While it repeated many examples and reiterated many conclusions from earlier treatises, it was also the fullest consideration of witchcraft thus far produced.[61] Its chief author, Heinrich Kramer, delved more deeply than many previous authorities into the nature and function of witchcraft, church rites, and the many common spells and charms that seemed to hover between them. The result was by no means greater clarity. Like all late medieval witchcraft theorists, Kramer feared that many common spells might be witchcraft in disguise. He repeated standard prohibitions against including strange words or unknown names in spells or charms, for these could signify compacts with the devil. Those who used such spells might be entirely unaware of their true character, and the results achieved could be wholly beneficial, but the corrupting power of demons remained.[62] Thus Kramer echoed Nider and other earlier authorities by arguing that no one should seek to relieve bewitchment by recourse to other witches.[63] Like Nider, he recommended ecclesiastically sanctioned remedies such as prayer, confession, the sign of the cross, and exorcism, and he was particularly strong in advocating the use of sacramentals such as holy water, consecrated salt, and blessed candles to combat witchcraft.[64] Nevertheless, he also maintained that the means by which faithful Christians might protect themselves from demonic forces extended beyond the "remedies of the church."[65] He thus entered into a detailed analysis of the nature and effectiveness of many ambiguous rites, and he offered complicated conclusions.

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[59] "Questio xxvi vtrum licitum sit per carmina scripta uel uerba sacra benedicere infirmos homines uel iumenta [. . .] Respondet Thomas 2.2, ubi supra, quod sic septem conditionibus seruatis. Una est ut uideatur ne uerba aliquid contineant quod pertineat ad inuocationes demonum expressas uel tacitas. Secunda ne contineant ignota nomina [. . .] Tertia ne materia uerborum aliquid falsitatis contineat [. . .] Sexta ut in alligatione prolatione uel scriptura diuinorum uerborum respectus solum habeatur ad sacra uerba et ad intellectum eorum." Nider, *Preceptorium* 1.11.gg.

[60] "Questio xxvii unde ortum habeant benedictiones et carminationes quas uetule hodie super infirmos et uiri quidam faciunt? Respondetur quod principium horum fuit sanctissimum, sed sicut omnia demonis instinctu deprauantur mediantibus demonibus et malis hominibus [. . .] Sicuti etiam hodie literatos et sacre theologie doctores noui qui infirmos uisitantes similia uerba egrotis applicauerunt non solum demoniacis." Ibid. 1.11.hh.

[61] On the lack of originality in the *Malleus*, see Brian P. Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, 2nd ed. (London, 1995), 54–55. In contrast, Broedel, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, makes the *Malleus*'s originality a central theme.

One of the more involved analyses of magical rites in the *Malleus* focused, like Nider's tale of Ernestine and her injured friend, on a man afflicted by bewitchment in his foot. A merchant from the German town of Speyer was traveling through the region of Swabia. One day, as he walked with two local servants, a woman approached. The servants warned that she was a well-known witch and he should defend himself with the sign of the cross, but he was obstinate and refused, whereupon he felt tremendous pain in his left foot, so that he could barely walk. After three days of suffering, a local healer was called, who examined the merchant, but only after swearing that he would not employ witchcraft to cure him. The healer first determined that the injury was in fact due to witchcraft by pouring molten lead into water and observing the shapes that formed. He proceeded to visit the merchant for three days, touching the foot and saying certain words over it. On the third day, the injury was cured.[66]

Kramer stated flatly that this healing rite did not entail witchcraft. Nevertheless, doubts remained about the particular power or "virtue" used to identify and remove the bewitchment.[67] The healer maintained that he was able to divine the presence of witchcraft from the behavior of molten lead because of the nature of lead itself and certain astral forces imbued in the metal, but the degree to which astral bodies could impart occult power to earthly items was a point of considerable debate in this period.[68] Many authorities maintained that much astral magic was simply a screen for demonic operations, since it frequently involved the recitation of secret words or ceremonies that might tacitly invoke demons. Kramer himself noted that astral magic was often merely demonic magic in disguise.[69] Nevertheless, all authorities admitted that astral bodies could impart some special properties to mundane materials. Only a few lines before he raised doubts about the nature of the action of the lead, Kramer had stated that if the lead's response was due purely to astral influence, the rite would be "blameless and very commendable."[70]

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[62] Kramer, *Malleus maleficarum* 1.2, fol. 10r; 2.1.16, fol. 76r; 2.2.6, fol. 86v.

[63] Ibid. 2.2, fols. 76v–77r.

[64] Ibid. 2.2.1–3, fols. 79v–83v, and 2.1, fols. 43v–45r. Broedel, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, 152, notes that sacramentals "provided the most consistently reliable protection against witchcraft" described in the *Malleus*.

[65] "In contrarium est quod sicut deus et natura non abundant in superfluis, ita non deficiunt in necessariis, quare et necessario fidelibus contra huiusmodi insultus demonum sunt data non solum remedia preseruatiua." Kramer, *Malleus maleficarum* 2.2, fol. 76v. "Aliis vero duobus modis vltimis tollere maleficium potest esse vel licitum vel non vanum secundum canonistas et quod tollerari possunt vbi remedia ecclesie prius attemptata, vt sunt exorcismi ecclesie, suffragia sanctorum implorata, ac vera penitentia, nihil effecissent." Ibid., fol. 77v.

[66] Ibid., fols. 78v–79r.

[67] "Sed qua virtute maleficium fugauit et species rerum in plumbo causauit sub dubio relinquitur." Ibid., fol. 79r.

[68] Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 131–133.

[69] Kramer, *Malleus maleficarum* 1.2, fol. 10r–v. Similarly Nicholas Magni of Jauer, *De superstitionibus*, fols. 52v–53v and 54v; Hartlieb, *Buch aller verbotenen Künste*, 38.

The real cause for concern in the healer's actions was the nature of the healing rite once witchcraft had been identified. No natural power, Kramer argued, could fully remove a bewitchment, and the healer had, in fact, made no pretense of effecting a natural cure, instead speaking certain ritual words over the foot. Were this rite intended to implore divine aid, the healer should have admitted the possibility that it might be ineffective, since God could not be compelled. Yet this man, Kramer noted, was certain that his actions would produce results. Moreover, the fact that he had performed the ritual of speaking over the foot on three consecutive days was ominous. Authorities frequently stressed that divine power did not need to be supplicated in any particular formulaic fashion.[71] That this healer followed such a precise formula caused Kramer to suspect demonic agency. He accepted that the man had probably not formed an express pact with the devil, yet he could not allow that the healing rite might, by any inherent power, have compelled demons to act. That the rite did appear to produce results therefore indicated a tacit pact, and while the healer was no witch, Kramer still judged him guilty of heresy and superstition.[72]

As already noted, the fear of tacit pacts with demons had always been central to Christian authorities' concern about common spells and charms. For witchcraft theorists of the fifteenth century, this concern supported their basic notions about the essential emptiness of ritual acts—that demons always responded because of a pact and not because of any effect of rites themselves—but also stood in some tension to this notion, causing authorities to lavish attention on the specific forms of various rites, as Kramer did above, attempting to discern whether they might tacitly invoke demons. While this tension was by no means fatal, it was problematic, leading many authorities, like Nider, to suggest that only trained clerics be allowed to perform certain rites because of the possibility of dangerous corruptions in their forms. Kramer, too, addressed such issues, but proved fairly tolerant of a number of common rites. At one point, in fact, he repeated Nider's story about Ernestine healing her friend's foot with the power of prayer and then condemning the other remedies the man had tried. While this tale could be taken to indicate that all spells and charms, aside from official prayers, should be rigidly proscribed because of the danger of demonic corruption, Kramer asserted a different interpretation. Ernestine (again made to play the role of a theologian) had judiciously banned only illicit spells and conjurations; legitimate ones existed and should be permitted to the laity to combat witchcraft.[73]

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[70] "Et hoc quod saturni influxum super plumbum tanquam ex eius dominio causatum allegauit irreprehensibilis extitit et potius commendandus fuit." Kramer, *Malleus maleficarum* 2.2, fol. 79r. Similarly Nicholas Magni of Jauer, *De superstitionibus*, fols. 40v, 61r; Hartlieb, *Buch aller verbotenen Künste*, 80.

[71] "Quinto ne spes habeatur in modo scribendi aut ligandi in quacumque huiusmodi vanitate que ad diuinam reuerentiam non pertineat, quia alias omnino iudicabitur superstitiosum." Kramer, *Malleus maleficarum* 2.2.6, fol. 86v; following Nider (*Preceptorium* 1.11.gg) and ultimately Aquinas (*Summa theologiae* 2.2.96.4).

[72] "Potius videtur quod per aliquid pactum adminus tacitum cum demone initum hoc practicauerit," and later "Non tam suspectus quam vt manifeste deprehensus adminus licet non super expresseum initum cum demone pactum tamen super tacitum iudicatur et tanquam pro coniuncto habere et penis adminus in secundo modo sententiandi infra contentis, sed puniri debet cum abiuratione solemni." Kramer, *Malleus maleficarum* 2.2, fol. 79r.

Kramer discussed such spells and other rites at various points in the *Malleus*, sometimes leaving the precise nature of their operation unexplored, but sometimes attempting to explicate it in detail. For example, when women in German lands suspected that a cow had been drained of milk by witchcraft, they would hang a milk pail over a fire and strike it, and the witch responsible for the theft would feel the blows. Likewise, if a cow was injured by witchcraft, it could be brought into a field, usually on a feast day or holy day, with a man's breeches or other "foul thing" (*immundum*) placed over it, and beaten with sticks. It would then go to the door of the person who had bewitched it, identifying the malefactor.[74] Kramer was quite clear that these rites functioned through demonic agency. Always ready to betray his servants, the devil was perfectly happy for witches to be identified in these ways. The rites were not illegitimate, however, because those performing them merely exploited demons; they did not honor or worship demons in any fashion, nor did they form any pact with them, express or tacit.[75] Rather, albeit with diabolical complicity, these rituals seemed to exert some real force of compulsion over demons.

Kramer's impulse to associate some seemingly direct efficacy with certain ritualized acts applied to divine operations as well as demonic ones. For protection from hailstorms, for example, he reiterated the rite discussed by Nider, in which hail was adjured by the wounds of Christ and by the four evangelists to fall as water.[76] He also recounted another ritual. After hail had begun falling, three hailstones should be thrown into a fire while the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and the opening words of the Gospel of John were recited. The sign of the cross should be made in the four cardinal directions, "the word was made flesh" repeated three times, and finally "by the words of this gospel may the tempest be dispersed" said thrice. Kramer maintained that this ritual conjuration was "entirely proper, nor should it be judged with suspicion."[77] Of course, the invocation of divine power provided the main operative force of the rite, but he explicitly concluded that casting hail into the fire, while secondary, was not entirely ineffectual, since those performing the rite thereby indicated their desire to destroy the works of the devil. Thus it was more effective to perform this rite while throwing hail into fire than while casting it into water, because fire would destroy the hail more quickly.[78] While one could construct a rationale that hurling hail into fire was still an essentially empty sign indicating to God an intensity of pious wrath against the devil, thus resulting in a more rapid deployment of divine power, Kramer's bald statement that one form of action was more effective than another seems perilously close to asserting that the particular form of this ritual exerted real force.

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[73] "Gratia hiuis exempli queritur an non alie benedictiones et carminationes seu etiam coniurationes per exorcismos habeant efficaciam cum hic videantur reprobari? Respondetur quod hec virgo non reprobauit nisi illicita carmina cum illicitis coniurantionibus et exorcismis." Ibid. 2.2.6, fol. 86r.

[74] Ibid. 2.2, fol. 79r.

[75] Christians were not forbidden all interaction with demons; as noted above, all the faithful were believed to have some power to exorcise demons. The critical distinction for authorities was that the faithful should interact with demons only in such a way as to "command or compel" them ("imperando seu compellendo"), never to "solicit" them: Nider, *Preceptorium* 1.11.kk; similarly Nicholas Magni of Jauer, *De superstitionibus*, fol. 48r.

[76] Kramer, *Malleus maleficarum* 2.2.7, fol. 91r.

[77] "Lapilli enim tres ex grandine in ignem sub inuocatione sanctissime trinitatis proiiciuntur, oratio dominica cum angelica salutatione bis aut ter adiungitur, euangelium Johannis, In principio erat verbum, cum signo crucis vndique contra tempestatem ante et retro et ex omni parte terre subinfertur. Et tunc cum in fine replicat trinies verbum caro factum est et trinies ex post dixerit per euangelica dicta fugiat tempestas ista. Subito, siquidem tempestas ex maleficio fuit procurata, cessabit. Hec verissima experimenta, nec suspecta iudicantur." Ibid., fols. 90v–91r. "Experimenta" was a common term for the rites of ritual magic, and particularly necromantic conjurations (Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites*, 23).

A final example will serve to highlight Kramer's complicated, often convoluted position regarding ritual invocations of supernatural power. Authorities frequently had difficulty drawing confessions from suspected witches, for the devil would exert his power to keep them silent. As a means of proof, Kramer recommended that judges "conjure" suspects to weep, for a true witch would be unable to cry, although she might feign it by smearing her face with spittle. Placing his hands on the suspect's head, the judge should recite the following formula: "I conjure you by the bitter tears shed on the cross by our savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, for the salvation of the world, and by the ardent tears of the most glorious virgin Mary, his mother, spread over his wounds at evening, and by all the tears that all the saints and elect of God have shed in the world, from whose eyes all tears have now been dried, that insofar as you are innocent you shed tears, but by no means if you are guilty."[79] Shortly thereafter, Kramer noted that inquisitors in German lands had also had success with placing bits of blessed wax in holy water, invoking the trinity, and forcing suspected witches to drink from this mixture three times. The witches would then break their silence and confess.[80]

Kramer would have perceived in these actions divine power operating through the invocation of holy names and the application of sacramental elements. Yet there is cause for confusion. Why was a man who argued against the need for any specific ritual in invoking divine power so careful to present an exact and fairly complex verbal formula? Why was physical contact, the laying on of hands, required? And what, exactly, was being "conjured" here? A demon restraining a guilty witch from confessing might legitimately be exorcised, but here the accused was conjured to weep only if she was innocent.[81] In the case of the holy water and wax, why did a man who elsewhere condemned a rite specifically because it was employed a certain number of times here prescribe having the suspect drink three times? There would, of course, be responses to such challenges. The laying on of hands was often described in the Bible, particularly in terms of healing and casting out spirits.[82] The triple application of the holy potion could be characterized as complementing the invocation of the trinity. Yet none of these explanations would entirely alleviate the underlying tensions about the efficacy of ritual and the function of ritual forms evident here.

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[78] "Respondetur utique per alia sacra verba proiiciens autem intendit diabolum molestare dum eius facturam per inuocationem sanctissime trinitatis destruere conatur. Ad ignem potius quam ad aquam proiicit, quia cicius dum resoluuntur." Kramer, *Malleus maleficarum* 2.2.7, fol. 91r.

[79] "Coniuro te per amorosas lachrymas a nostro saluatore domino Iesu Christo in cruce per salute mundi effusas, ac per ardentissimas lachrymas ipsius gloriosissime virginis Marie matris eius super vulnera ipsius hora vespertina sparsas, et per omnes lachrymas quas hic in mundo omnes sancti et electi dei effuderunt, et a quorum oculis iam omnem lachrymam abstersit, vt inquantum sis innoxia lachrymas effundas, si nocens nullo modo." Ibid. 3.15, fol. 107r.

[80] Ibid., fol. 108r.

[81] One could suppose that Kramer feared the presence of a demon exerting its power to prevent an innocent suspect from weeping, and so the conjuration was directed at this entity, but this would still not necessarily cause the freed suspect to commence weeping, as the conjuration explicitly intended.

[82] For example, Christ in Mark 5:23 and 6:5 and in Luke 4:40–41, and various apostles in Mark 16:18 and Acts 8:18 and 28:8.

IN IDENTIFYING MAGICAL ACTS WITH DEMONIC POWER, and in their attempts to clearly distinguish the rites of demonic magic from legitimate rituals directed toward God and divine power, late medieval witchcraft theorists engaged with long-standing elements of medieval Christian thought. They did so, however, with a mounting intensity that had not been seen for centuries, arguably since late antiquity.[83] This was at least partly because they increasingly confronted the issue of superstition as a practical problem rather than a purely theoretical theological issue, uncovering and attempting to explicate specific instances of potentially confused belief and questionable practice mainly in the area of commonly used spells and charms. This approach reflected the pastoral "theology of piety" developing especially in German-speaking lands in the fifteenth century.[84] If witchcraft theorists were themselves not always the most profound theological thinkers, many leading theologians in this period were focusing on similar issues, including magic and superstition, and dealing with specific instances of practice rather than grand abstractions.[85] The concerns these men demonstrated, and their focus, derived from major religious and ecclesiastical developments. Particularly in the wake of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, the medieval church had sought to define and enforce correct belief among the faithful in Europe far more assiduously than it had previously. Through the institution of structures as diverse, although ultimately closely related, as legal inquisition, sacramental confession, and pastoral preaching, the church in the late Middle Ages became increasingly involved in investigating and controlling common beliefs and practices.[86]

The intensity of authorities' concerns surely also rested on the growing fear of demons and the devil in the later Middle Ages. This general development has never been fully explained, but its manifestation in many areas of late medieval religious culture is apparent, particularly in terms of a growing preoccupation among clerical authorities to discern demonic activity in areas such as spirit possession, mystical experience, and magical activity with less ambiguity than they had previously allowed.[87] Moreover, fifteenth-century authorities concerned with the operation of demonic power, and thus magical practices, were compelled to understand that operation within a much more rigid and precise system of scholastic demonology that had developed since the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Demonic activity in the world was now conceived as strictly limited by the accepted laws of essentially Aristotelian physics.[88] Probing more deeply and with new rigor into demonic action and its supposed manifestation in any number of potentially superstitious common spells, charms, and other rites, authorities clearly pressed the limits of traditional approaches to understanding the workings of demonic, and concomitantly divine, power in the world.

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[83] On early medieval confrontations between Christian practice and pagan superstitions, see Flint, *Rise of Magic*, but also Jolly, *Popular Religion*. Yitzhak Hen, *Culture and Religion in Merovingian Gaul, A.D. 481–751* (Leiden, 1995), 154–206, argues strongly that little real pagan practice unaccommodated to Christianity persisted after the seventh or eighth century.

[84] On "Frömmigkeitstheologie," see Berndt Hamm, "Frömmigkeit als Gegenstand theologiegeschichtlicher Forschung: Methodisch-historische Überlegungen am Beispiel von Spätmittelalter und Reformation," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 74 (1977): 464–497; Hamm, "Von der spätmittelalterlichen reformatio zur Reformation: Der Prozeß normativer Zentrierung von Religion und Gesellschaft in Deutschland," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 84 (1993): 7–82, esp. 18–24; Hamm, "Normative Centering in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries: Observations on Religiosity, Theology, and Iconology," *Journal of Early Modern History* 3, no. 4 (1999): 307–354, 325–330. Baumann, *Aberglaube*, 1: 201–202, does not use this term but stresses the desire to create a "theologia practica" and extend scholastic theology to a wider audience evident especially among what she labels the "Vienna school" of late medieval authors concerned with superstition.

[85] Daniel Hobbins, "The Schoolman as Public Intellectual: Jean Gerson and the Late Medieval Tract," *AHR* 108, no. 5 (December 2003): 1308–1337, esp. the chart on 1336–1337.

[86] For one approach to this broad subject, see Dyan Elliott, *Proving Woman: Female Spirituality and Inquisitional Culture in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton, N.J., 2004).

Attempting to reinforce their construction of witchcraft as utterly and absolutely diabolical, late medieval witchcraft theorists emphasized traditional Christian doctrine that magic operated through demonic agency, not any inherent power in the spell or the human spell-caster.[89] They thus reveal an element of "disenchantment" buried at the heart of medieval notions of "magic" itself. Yet they also reveal the dilemma that such disenchantment presented to Christian thinkers, since it impinged on "religious" as well as "magical" rites. For all that Protestantism constructed a new theology of religious ritual, still throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries this tension endured. Indeed, while Protestant authorities regarded the medieval church as profoundly superstitious, their basic definition of superstition as deformed or misdirected worship was essentially medieval, and they remained deeply troubled by what R. W. Scribner so aptly termed the "twilight-zone" of spells, charms, and potential superstitions that lay between entirely legitimate ecclesiastical rite and wholly condemned demonic witchcraft.[90] It would be left to the Enlightenment to shift the terms of debate decidedly, reconfiguring superstition as an irrational rather than an improper act. "Magical" rites were no longer condemned because they represented a perverse redirecting of "religious" devotion toward demons rather than toward the deity. Instead they were derided, along with much formally "religious" ritual, as silly and nonsensical.[91] Thus the elaborate parsing of proper and improper rites and the convoluted considerations of how they might or might not interact with supernatural entities that had plagued centuries past suddenly became unnecessary, at least for those who considered themselves enlightened.

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[87] Baumann, *Aberglaube*, 1: 318–321, notes but does not extensively analyze the particularly demonized nature of late medieval concern over superstition. On general fear of the devil, see Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Lucifer: The Devil in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1984), 295–296; Robert Muchembled, *A History of the Devil from the Middle Ages to the Present*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge, 2003), 20–21. On growing concerns with spirit possession and the discernment of spirits, see Barbara Newman, "Possessed by the Spirit: Devout Women, Demoniacs, and the Apostolic Life in the Thirteenth Century," *Speculum* 73, no. 3 (1998): 733–770; Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 274–319; Elliott, *Proving Woman*, 264–296.

[88] The most probing study of this development has been Stephens, *Demon Lovers*. While he concentrates on conceptions of demonic bodies and demonic sex, the ramifications of this development were far broader.

[89] Peter Brown, "Sorcery, Demons, and the Rise of Christianity: From Late Antiquity into the Middle Ages," in Brown, *Religion and Society in the Age of Saint Augustine* (London, 1972), 119–146, esp. 131–138, although as Brown points out, in late antiquity Christian authorities tended to deemphasize human participation in magic, while late medieval witchcraft theorists focused strongly on human agents, if not human agency.

[90] R. W. Scribner, "Ritual and Popular Religion in Catholic Germany at the Time of the Reformation," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 35, no. 1 (1984): 47–77, 71. Saxer, *Aberglaube*, makes clear the degree to which Calvin's notion of superstition, based on ancient and patristic sources, was similar to that of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Catholic reformers, and even to that of medieval scholastic theologians, although he of course located superstition in the world very differently than they did.

The fifteenth century was, then, neither an end nor a beginning in terms of "magical thought" or "disenchantment" in Europe. It was, instead, part of a profoundly gradual transition whereby foundational Christian beliefs about the functioning of religio-magical rites shifted ultimately to the enlightened rejection (never fully realized in the eighteenth or subsequent centuries) of all "magic" and much traditional "religion." Yet within that slow shift, the fifteenth century was an important moment, for in it we can see the strands connecting concern about witchcraft and superstition back to earlier medieval doctrines of magic and demonic power, as well as the newly heightened tensions and energies that would fuel these concerns in the coming early modern age. Studies of late medieval Europe are often dominated by overarching paradigms of autumnal waning or, more actively, prolonged crises leading finally to the Renaissance and Reformation.[92] Conversely, some scholars have stressed the enduring vitality of traditional medieval beliefs and practices into the fifteenth century.[93] Growing concerns about witchcraft, common spells, and superstitions, however, illustrate how new dynamics and tensions emerging in this period (neither so extreme nor so sudden as to warrant the term "crisis," perhaps) interacted within long-standing Christian beliefs and helped drive authorities toward new models of thought and understanding, even as they sought to preserve, reassert, or reaffirm traditional ones.

While the arguments, concerns, and conclusions of witchcraft theorists used to be relegated to the fringe of European history, we now know how central demonological thought was to numerous areas of intellectual activity, certainly in the early modern period.[94] Indeed, many scholars are coming to argue that witchcraft, magic, and magical thought remain integral aspects even of Western modernity. Nevertheless, authoritative denial and intellectual dismissal of magic have been salient features of modern Western culture for several centuries. This "disenchantment," whether given that label or not, continues to be viewed essentially in terms of emerging skepticism and repudiation of magical beliefs.[95] Even when Weberian arguments are recast in more nuanced and specific terms, such as conceptions of ritual operations, scholars still tend to seek defining moments of change in which old systems were substantially rejected. Yet elements of disenchantment existed already within premodern European conceptions of magical and other ritual operations. The historical processes of disenchantment, therefore, cannot be understood solely in terms of rejection of magical beliefs motivated by forces external to magical thought, whether Protestant theology, scientific rationalism, or Enlightenment philosophy.

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[91] Pott, *Aufklärung und Aberglaube*, 100–124; Campagne, *Homo Catholicus*, 100–112.

[92] Overview and trenchant criticism of these models in Howard Kaminsky, "From Lateness to Waning to Crisis: The Burden of the Later Middle Ages," *Journal of Early Modern History* 4, no. 1 (2000): 85–125.

[93] For example, Bernd Moeller's classic "Frömmigkeit in Deutschland um 1500" (1965), translated as "Religious Life in Germany on the Eve of the Reformation," in Gerald Strauss, ed., *Pre-Reformation Germany* (London, 1972), 13–42; more recently Duffy's magisterial *Stripping of the Altars*.

[94] Most thoroughly demonstrated in Clark, *Thinking with Demons*.

[95] Styers, *Making Magic*, esp. 38–44; Wolfgang Behringer, *Witches and Witch-Hunts: A Global History* (Cambridge, 2004), 165.

Magical beliefs were themselves, in the tensions and ambiguities they produced, an important force driving European culture along a trajectory of disenchantment.[96] The fifteenth century—itself not a point of radical rupture, but a critical juncture when many older, medieval systems and structures can be seen to shift noticeably toward more modern forms—reveals how the long history of magic in Europe is an important element of the putatively modern narrative of disenchantment.

[96] On belief as a historical force, see Thomas Kselman, "Introduction," in Kselman, ed., *Belief in History: Innovative Approaches to European and American Religion* (Notre Dame, Ind., 1991), 1–15.

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