

Traditions of Paganism and the Christian Church

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*The late antique period witnessed the overlap of Christian teaching with pagan practices. The rise of the Christian Church marked a change in the way pagan practices termed magic were viewed, tolerated, and altered. Historian Valerie Flint addresses these changes in *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* by examining how magic was defined during the second to sixth centuries and how the Church responded to magical practices in a pagan world. However, more recently scholarship concerning late antique pagan practices and Church authority disputes Flint's claims.*

Magic in the Late Roman Empire was not looked upon favorably. Although the definition of magic as well as the tolerance from the Church, other authorities, and society changed during Late Antiquity, the use of magic did not decline. The rise of the Christian Church marked a change in the way magic was viewed and tolerated. Historian and author Valerie Flint addresses the rise of power and influence of the Christian Church as well as its relationship and involvement with magic and paganism in *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe*. Flint examines how magic was defined during the second to sixth century and how the Church responded to magical practices in a pagan world. She also explores the differences in Church sanctioned customs and traditional pagan practices. The purpose of this paper is to evaluate Flint's thesis and supporting arguments by discussing the manner in which the Church defined magic, the pagan traditions that were adopted, the pagan traditions that were forbidden, the people who were involved in the use of magic, and the different views concerning magic and Christianity by Church Fathers.

The definition of what constituted magic was not easily definable in Late Antiquity, and it is no easier to do so now, especially considering the age of the term magic and the various transitions it has faced in various societies throughout history.¹ Valerie Flint provides two different definitions for the term magic (or *magia*) in the introduction of *The Rise of Magic in Medieval Europe* as well as additions to, or inexact variations of the term in different articles and books. According to Flint, at least in this instance as she provides several definitions in her writing, magic can be defined as the "preternatural control over nature by human beings, with the assistance of forces more powerful than they," with the definition of "...a type of wonder or delight."² Flint acknowledges that her use of the term magic will cover several acceptable definitions of the word.³ With Flint's definition, the realm of what can be considered magical practice is unlimited, leaving any action open for question about its affiliation with magic.

¹ Jan Bremmer, Jan Veenstra, *Metamorphosis of Magic from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period* (New York: Peeters Publishers, 2002), Chapter 1.

² Valerie I. J. Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 3.

³ *Ibid.* 5.

On the other hand, historian Fritz Graf defines magic as communication with higher powers in order to procure a desire or need.⁴ This could include asking for a cure to an illness, the inheritance of money, or the demand to place a love spell on another person. His definition restricts the realm of magic, though it does not leave room for fields that have traditionally been associated with magic. The difficulty historians have in defining magic reflects the difficulty that the Church and society had in the late antique period. In fact, historian Scott B. Noegel writes, “Many historians of religions have regarded magic simply as a type of religious practice.”⁵

Flint states that traditional portrayals of magic and the Church in Late Antiquity show a weak Church forced to integrate practices. She also provides several reasons as to why the Church would decide to integrate pagan rituals. Flint describes the rural pagan population as being an overwhelming majority over Christians. She also asserts that the Church was unable to view pagan practices in the manner in which they were intended, often times benign, making pagan magical use that much more threatening to the Church.

Despite the vastly different opinions of magic and the Church during Late Antiquity, Flint asserts that the Early Christian Church consciously integrated pagan practices into the Church in order to maintain a peaceful relationship with a large and influential pagan population.⁶ Flint’s take on magic and the Church places the Church in a more powerful and wiser role. Her early Church consisted of leaders who wanted to grow in influence and power while also appeasing large groups of pagans. Most importantly, her depiction of the Church shows a history of magical practices.

The early Christian Church faced many difficulties in regards to pagan magical practices. Part of the problem with magic was the inability to provide a concrete definition. In some instances, magic could be defined as citing a spell or incantation. At other times, it might be mixing a potion. These purposes that called for incantations or potions varied, sometimes being to cure illness and other times, to harm others. Magic has also been affiliated with fortune telling and other practices that fall into the realm of divination. The nature of magic caused it to be indefinable, yet the Christian Church saw a need to address magical use. This too would cause a problem because the Church was unable to provide sufficient guidelines to differentiate between acceptable and unacceptable magical practices.⁷

Approved magical use had to be positive in nature, had to be realistic and useful in daily life, or it had to have some sort of Biblical foundation in order to be acceptable.⁸ At the same time, late antique laws helped restrict non-authorized magical use. However, these laws were designed to protect people from wrongful accusations or harm. This type of danger included poison and

⁴ Fritz Graf, “Theories of Magic in Antiquity,” *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World (Religions in the Graeco-Roman World)*, ed. P. Meyer & P. Mirecki, (New York: Brill Academic Publishers, 2002).

⁵ Scott B. Noegel, *Prayer, Magic, and the Stars in the Ancient and Late Antique World* (Philadelphia: The Pennsylvania University Press, 2003), 9.

⁶ Valerie Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe*.

⁷ Allen E. Jones, *Social Mobility in Late Antique Gaul: Strategies and Opportunities for the Non-Elite* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 300.

⁸ Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe*, 51.

love potions.⁹ The practicality of this type of law prevented poisons from widely circulating as potions designed to combat illness, bad luck, or assorted vanity issues like baldness and impotence. Magic and medicine tended to overlap in this area.

The relationship between Christianity and pagan magic is complicated because the Church often lacked consensus on what practices were permissible. Flint uses the writings and teachings of Church fathers and authorities, like Gregory of Tours and Augustine of Hippo, to defend her points.¹⁰ Flint briefly discusses Gregory of Tours' use of tokens and relics in the healing of others as a magical practice. Instead of referring to it as magic, Gregory suggests that his abilities are gifts from the Christian God for his faith and duty. Although many of his practices seemed similar to magic as discussed so far, he was not accused of witchcraft.

Similarly, Augustine defends the Eucharist, a Christian practice involving ritualistic cannibalism and magic, in *The City of God, Confessions*, and in his various sermons by discussing how the idea of the Eucharist is practiced. Augustine believes that while what is seen when partaking in the ritual appears to be one thing, the Christian faith demands that the Eucharist be seen as the body of Christ, and that the Church becomes the body of Christ in participating in this and many other rituals.¹¹ Flint compares acts like this with pagan practices and suggests that Augustine made these claims in order to ease the transition from paganism to Christianity. However, Flint goes on to say that Augustine was not a supporter of pagan tradition, despite temptations to engage in magic from time to time.

Medical practices have historically been linked with magic. Among the reasons for this association was that medicine primarily required someone of special knowledge to administer medical procedures, and many of the methods used to cure illness were inconsistent. Cures also relied on the use of incantations, potions, and amulets. Such methods were used during Late Antiquity. The nature of medicine insinuated not only magic, but possibly magic conducted by witches. The problem of potential witchcraft accusations was exacerbated by the fact that many potion makers were women or others of lower rank in society. Although the accusation of witchcraft could be met with severe financial penalties if proven wrong, those who were thought to be guilty could face physical and spiritual punishment on behalf of the Church.¹² By the Late Antique period, medicine was practiced among different groups of people, and the allowance of magical practice depended upon the group.

Late Antiquity often separated the physician, an educated or elite member of society, from the folk healer who frequently utilized medical techniques often affiliated with magic. Prior to the Late Antique period, physicians were lower ranked, and therefore, more susceptible to any negative ramifications resulting in death or botched procedures from the ones they healed. They

⁹ Jones, *Social Mobility in Late Antique Gaul*, Chapter 8.

¹⁰ Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe*, 112, 404.

¹¹ Augustine of Hippo, *Sermon 272*, Last accessed April 12, 2012.

http://www.earlychurchtexts.com/public/augustine_sermon_272_eucharist.htm (April 15, 2012).

¹² Jones, *Social Mobility in Late Antique Gaul*, Chapter 7-8; Edward Peters, *The Magician, the Witch, and the Law (The Middle Ages Series)* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978), 20.

were also often less likely to receive patronage from wealthier individuals. However, physicians in the Late Antique period prospered far more and were held in higher esteem.

Physicians were given the task of preserving older medical texts but also had to add their own knowledge to those practices.¹³ There was also opportunity for physicians to work for more prestigious people and earn better educational and social opportunities when they embraced Church teachings. Historian Allen E. Jones states that Augustine of Hippo congratulated physicians who embraced the Christian Church. Physicians tended to utilize practices that were ordained by the Church, even if those practices were different in name only. This included calling upon God, angels, and saints, or using religious items to heal the wounded and the sick.

Folk healers were more likely to work with less wealthy patients, often serving a much larger group of people than physicians, while earning a fraction of the money. Their practices involved offering incantations, which called upon good beings or spirits, and expelled bad spirits or demons. These methods also often included home remedies and the use of amulets to encourage healing. These were the individuals who would more often find themselves accused of witchcraft. Some folk healers might have believed that they were practicing actual magic by calling upon higher powers or using the stars and potions to fulfill their desires.¹⁴ Others were aware of their limitations or that they were simply frauds trying to earn money from those in need. Individuals like these more often than not sold items like love potions and told fortunes in addition to healing. Still others were able to utilize the methods they learned to cure or reduce illness and disease.

Folk healers were more likely to be accused of witchcraft or of causing some sort of damage that clerics commonly produced. There are several documented accounts of nuns and other church officials who had to correct the work of folk healers. For example, Saint Monegundis healed a young man who had been poisoned by a folk healer.¹⁵ A story like this would promote the Church and the decrees made in terms of magic and medicine by making the work of the folk healer seem foolish at best and murderous at worst. Spreading such stories in a practical sense suggests that the Church had managed to remove the unsafe practices in magic and healing while retaining the ideas that obviously worked. Any failures on the part of the Church's ordained healing practices was not a failure of the cleric's interpretation, but instead a decision on the part of God. In a spiritual sense, the Church could claim that it was not God's will for a person to heal or live, and so nothing could have been done to prevent death.

By being able to claim that failures in Church-ordained practices were decisions of God, the Church was not demonstrating an integration of paganism and Christianity with the goal of appeasing pagans but adopting techniques that typically produced positive results and using them to assert dominance. In addition, both physicians and folk-healers worked towards the same goals, often utilizing different techniques with similar features. The difference between what the Church authorized and what folk healers practiced only existed in name.

¹³ Ibid, 256.

¹⁴ D. A. Russell, "Criticisms of Late Antiquity," *Rhetorical Exercises from Late Antiquity*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

¹⁵ Jones, *Social Mobility in Late Antique Gaul*, 298.

Whereas a physician or cleric might use a religious token or relic from a saint and say a prayer to bring about healing, a folk healer might use a stone and recite a spell. The relic and the stone might possess similar healing properties, and the prayer and the spell might ask for the same things—only the deity, spirit, or other higher being responsible for providing the request would be different. Flint suggests that these differences were decided upon by the Church, allowing some pagan traditions in, but not all. It provided for the mistrust and dislike of magic without completely eliminating it, while it also allowed for the Church to assume more authority. The use of tokens, amulets, and relics in Late Antiquity provides another example of Christian and pagan integration, though not in the manner that Flint argues.

Amulets played a major role in pagan rituals, healing, and other magical practices. Amulets could be made of several different types of material or be of one solid material. In fact, they were often made from materials found in holy places or from materials that were considered to have good luck or positive energy. Those qualities would or should, in turn, attract positive results. Folk healers would place the amulets on the body of a sick person in order to draw out evil spirits or encourage healing. Folk healers might tell patients to wear the amulet on a certain part of the body for a specified period of time.¹⁶ Flint states that Christian tokens replaced amulets but maintained similar uses. The tokens could be, and often were, constructed out of similar materials that pagan amulets had been, including certain wood, stones, hair, or anything that had been attributed with magical or positive properties. In many cases, tokens were often no different than amulets except for name and affiliation, although there are a few additions. Crosses decorated with flowers, fabrics, and other fine materials began replacing sacred and decorated trees (although these trees would become part of the Christian celebration of Christmas). Similarly, angels fighting demons replaced good spirits tackling bad ones over health, good fortune, and other important aspect of the human condition.¹⁷

Unlike the numerous differences between Church-approved physicians and pagan folk healers, there are minimal differences between the physical composition and the use of amulets and tokens. The use of amulets in healing, especially by folk healers, certainly have a magical connotation. Referring to an items as tokens instead of amulets removes the magical connotation from the practice and replaces it with divine intervention. Again, this is not an example of the Church and pagan integration. Instead, it represents the Church's way of placing itself in a position of authority.

The differences in prayer and spell casting became an important question in determining those practices allowed by the Church and those that were not.¹⁸ Chanting was an important aspect

¹⁶ Marvin Meyer and Paul Mirecki, *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World* (New York: Brill Academic Publishers, 2002), 12-39.

¹⁷ Valerie Flint, "The Demonisation of Magic and Sorcery in Late Antiquity: Christian Redefinitions of Pagan Religions," *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: Ancient Greece and Rome*, ed. Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999).

¹⁸ Scott B. Noegel, *Prayer, Magic, and the Stars in the Ancient and Late Antique World*, 9. Emile Durkheim differentiates between magic and religion or prayers by arguing that magic is an individual event while religions tend to be more social. However, his definitions lack explanations of the exact actions that are performed in each. For this reasons, his definition has not been included in the main text with Flint and Graf.

in many rituals. Exorcisms and healing used chanting to call upon the assistance of a deity. The Church referred to this chanting as prayer, whereas chanting outside of Church guidelines could be referred to as spell casting or incantations. Flint describes prayer as a practice by a religious person who submits to a deity to gain their assistance. Spell casting involves a magician or other person who seeks to compel the deity to do as the spell caster wants.¹⁹ These definitions certainly support her argument, showing a Church that wants to exclude dangerous and selfish magic, but allow other types with positive outcomes as a means to appease the pagan population. It also insists that a majority of miraculous and seemingly magical work be done through the Christian God rather than through various demons, higher beings, or demi-Gods.

Historian Fritz Graf does not agree with Flint's definition. "[A] magus is someone who, through the community of speech with the immortal gods, possesses an incredible power of spells for everything he wishes to do."²⁰ He follows this by suggesting that magic was/is based on the ability to converse with gods or other higher beings, making prayer another form of magic. Historians Jan Bremmer and Jan Veenstra defend Graf's definition of magic and prayer. They define magic as a term "...commonly used to designate a whole range of religious beliefs and ritual practices, whereby man seeks to gain control of his fate and fortune by supernatural means."²¹

Flint's definitions of prayer and magic share common elements with Bremmer and Veenstra's. Unlike Graf, however, Flint includes further criteria, including the intent of the chanter. However, Graf's definition seems to be more universal. Graf's definition allows for no difference between prayer and spell casting, contradicting part of Flint's argument. The difference in a pagan and a Christian exorcism or healing chant would be the deity called upon, just like the difference between an amulet and a token was often times just the name.

Despite Flint's claim, there were not standardized ways to differentiate between prayers and spells or tokens and amulets, and the rituals in and outside of the Church reflected these things. Consider, for example, an article by Roy Kotansky that discusses a cure for headaches in the form of a token and prayer. The token was to be worn in a capsule on the head or around the neck, and the person suffering had to recite a prayer. "Turn away, O Jesus, the Grim-Faced One, and on behalf of your maidservant, her headache, to (the) glory of your name."²² Kotansky provides an example of Church sanctioned healing in that the Deity spoken to is part of the Trinity and linked to the Christian God. Additionally, the person speaking submits himself to Jesus. This ritual includes prayer based on Flint's definition, or magic and a prayer based on Graf's definition. Kotansky points out a similarity to earlier headache cures which call for the same actions with very slight alterations to the chant. Not only does a change of this nature indicate the minimal differences between tokens and amulets and prayer and spell casting, it also shows the ease in which folk healers could adopt Christian teachings into already established remedies and traditions.

¹⁹ Valerie Flint, "The Demonisation of Magic and Sorcery in Late Antiquity."

²⁰ Fritz Graf, "Theories of Magic in Antiquity."

²¹ Jan N. Bremmer, Jan R. Veenstra, ix.

²² Roy Kotansky, "An Early Christian gold Lamella for Headache," *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World (Religions in the Graeco-Roman World)*, ed. P. Meyer & P. Mirecki, (New York: Brill Academic Publishers, 2002).

Another discussed spell is a pagan hymn designed to praise “light bearing deities.” The hymn reflects the complexity of determining the differences between both Flint and Graf’s definitions of prayer and spell casting. The hymn was not intact when discovered, and therefore lacks the hymn’s purpose outside of deity praise, but it does provide enough information to indicate that it could be considered a prayer. The hymn calls upon the constellation of Draco. It does not ask for benefits from the constellation Draco, and instead, offers praise.²³ While the Christian God is not the subject of this hymn, it does reflect reverence if not complete worship, so it meets both Flint and Graf’s standards for prayer. However, because Graf equates prayer to magic, it can also be considered magical.

Another spell created to assist during an exorcism includes pagan spell casting combined with a Christian demon.²⁴ This older version of this practice recalls pagan practices that can be considered magic and is quite similar to the newer exorcism. A different exorcism shows an incantation that combines Christian and Pagan deities. The Christian God and the Greek god, Hermes, are two of those mentioned. “[I am] Hermes sent to bring daemon out.”²⁵ The person performing the exorcism is to begin by stating this phrase. The purpose behind this claim is to make the demon wary of those performing the exorcism and the possibly of intervention by a more powerful Deity. Later passages in the exorcism include, “I adjure you by the god of the Hebrews.”²⁶ This line demonstrates that the Jewish and Christian God is being asked to intercede by someone claiming to be a Greek God, thereby, combining the Christian and a pagan belief system. The exorcism also calls for a mixture of oil and other herbs, a practice used both in Church sanctioned healings and in pagan practices. Unlike previous healing and protection practices, this exorcism indicates that pagan practices were adopting Christian ideologies into their own practices.

Most of the spells/prayers/incantations reviewed in this paper lack a thorough discussion of love spells in terms of any changes that took place as a result of Church influence. Generally, love potions and spells were frowned upon by the Church, either because of the possibility that a potion might end up poisoning the drinker or because the Church was interested in preserving the chastity of the target.²⁷

Despite that, a Coptic spell from the Late Antique period that calls for an intense love to form in the heart and loins of one young man for another man seems to differ from the types of spells that were, according to this research, typically Church approved. In fact, Flint and others indicate that love spells and potions were considered dangerous. “By your powers and your amulets... that just as I take you and put you at the door and the pathway of Phello,... you must

²³ Roy Kotansky and William Brashear, “A New Magical Formulary,” *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World (Religions in the Graeco-Roman World)*, ed. P. Meyer & P. Mirecki, (New York: Brill Academic Publishers, 2002).

²⁴ Ibid. 12.

²⁵ A. Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, Last accessed April 17, 2012.

http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/pagan_exorcism.htm

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Jones, *Social Mobility in Late Antique Gaul*, Chapter 8.

take his heart and his mind; you must dominate his entire body.”²⁸ This spell, created by Christians, calls upon the Christian God through his monks and utilizes amulets to complete the task. This spell does not show signs of a spell enchanter submitting to God, as Flint would suggest prayer should do, but demanding that God provide him with what he wants, as magicians do.

Flint’s argues for the incorporation of pagan traditions into developing Church customs to appease a large pagan community. Tokens replacing amulets, and prayer replacing spells demonstrates some of the ways in which this happened. Flint even credits Gregory the Great as being responsible for suggesting that Christian holidays should be celebrated during pagan festivals.²⁹ However, the relationship between Christianity and paganism is much more complex than Flint alludes to. Instead of merely imagining that the Church alone made the choice to adopt pagan customs, one should envision that both the Church and pagans adopted one another’s customs as indicated by the spells, prayers, and exorcisms discussed earlier. These particular spells also demonstrated a usefulness that the Church recognized, and therefore allowed within Church ritual.

Flint also argued that the Church allowed certain pagan practices while forbidding others. As long as the practice was ordained by the Church, there were no repercussions. Other practices could bring about severe punishment including removal from the Church.³⁰ Flint even argues that authority figures could use magic accusations to bring about death sentence to their enemies.³¹ Even though laws concerning magic in Late Antiquity varied from virtually non-existent to death sentences, those practicing medicine or trying to cure other ailments were at risk in the event that they failed in their attempts.³² Those who failed could face legal or spiritual repercussions, and such problems extended to more than just folk healers and recognizable magicians.

Historian Matthew Dickie discusses a case tried before the Court of Areopagus, an Athenian court of appeal, involving the death of a man who ingested a love potion. The woman responsible had not intentionally caused the death and was acquitted, but Dickie points out that love potions often contained deadly hemlock, and not all trials ended in a similar manner.³³ Dickie questions what the outcome might have been had the case not been contingent on the intent of the woman. He also questions the outcome in cases where death had not occurred, but an individual received or perceived a form of harm. Dickie concludes that an individual could pursue a private suit of damage against an accused magician.³⁴ Given Dickie’s findings, it is clear that the Church had the authority to punish those who broke the law or caused sufficient harm to others.

There were several problems with the manner in which the Church chose what to allow and what to forbid given that the standard of preventing harm was not always the deciding factor. Divination, or the ability to predict the future, was often frowned upon by the Church. Isidore of

²⁸ *Coptic Love Spell to Obtain a Male Lover*, Last accessed April 17, 2012.
<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/pwh/copticspell.asp>.

²⁹ Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe*, 91.

³⁰ Jones, *Social Mobility in Late Antique Gaul*, 308.

³¹ Flint, “The Demonisation of Magic and Sorcery in Late Antiquity.”

³² Jones 29; *Ibid*, 303.

³³ Matthew Dickie, *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 55.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 56.

Seville, a Church father, suggested that divination had no natural purpose, and was instead used to bring about luck, or fortune to the individuals able to do it.³⁵ The ability to predict the future was also an ability associated with higher or more powerful beings, including demons, gods, and the Christian God.³⁶

Divination was thought to occur while a person slept, making it difficult for an individual to control what they saw while asleep. Dreams that told the future were thought to have come from a higher power.³⁷ This methodology of seeing the future, while unapproved by the Church, has foundations in the Old Testament, specifically references to Joseph, son of Jacob, who not only had prophetic dreams, but interpreted the dreams of others.³⁸ There were also church affiliated individuals, such as Genevieve of Paris, a fifth century nun, who practiced divination and mind reading while also working to both heal and curse those who came to her in need. Genevieve also was credited with using her abilities to save Paris from attack.³⁹ Both Biblical narratives of divination and the writings about Genevieve technically defy the Church's view on that particular magical practice. However, Joseph and Genevieve's abilities could be viewed or taught as the work of the Christian God through holy individuals. Joseph and Genevieve served God's purpose by providing valuable insight to others, ultimately protecting their lives and way of existence, which ultimately protected and promoted the purpose and power of the Church.

Useful magic, such as parts of astrology tended to be approved by the Church, but like the exceptions of divination allowed in Church doctrine, the field astrology included several inconsistencies that should not have been approved by the Church. Isidore of Seville, who was against the use of divination, was a supporter of the natural aspects of the craft whereas Augustine of Hippo denounced it entirely.⁴⁰ The provided justification for astrology was that it was an branch of magic that served a useful and non-harmful purpose.⁴¹ Astrology and astronomy, though in different fields of modern study, were often linked together during the Late Antique period.⁴² While areas of astrology did focus on navigation, determining the seasons, and other scientific fields, other areas related to magical practices including medicine and divination.⁴³

The fields of medicine and divination had inconsistent rules in regards to Church opinion, and the association with astrology causes further question as to Flint's assessment that the Church was actively adopting certain pagan practices to appease the pagan population. With the examples of divination and astrology, Flint declares that religiously based practices involving divination and astrology is acceptable because of its uses in daily life, while the use of these practices for any other reason is forbidden because of its association with evil. She fails to discuss the overlap of

³⁵ Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe*, 50.

³⁶ Valerie Flint, "The Demonisation of Magic and Sorcery in Late Antiquity."

³⁷ Noegel, *Prayer, Magic, and the Stars in the Ancient and Late Antique World*, 132.

³⁸ Genesis 37-39.

³⁹ Jones, *Social Mobility in Late Antique Gaul*, 297-298.

⁴⁰ Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe*, 50.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 50.

⁴² Glen Warren Bowersock, Peter Robert Lamont Brown, Oleg Grabar, *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 319.

⁴³ Bowersock, *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World*, 319.

either practice, but this is due to the passing nature in which she mentions them. Flint is correct in that the Church did select certain practices and forbid others, offering justifications for their decisions.

The Church also used Christian writings and doctrine as justification for the stances it took on magic. The story of Joseph, son of Jacob, found in Genesis is just one example of the Church referring to magic (divination, healing, and other acts) used by God through individuals. Had Joseph used divination and dream interpretation as a way to benefit himself or called upon a deity other than God to perform those acts, the Church would have, according to Flint, disapproved of that magic. Other stories in the Bible reflect circumstances in which magic is used but ultimately presents punishments to the person responsible.

The story of Ham also provides another example of Biblically endorsed magic. Ham "saw the nakedness of his father (Noah)" drunk and on the floor of his tent. Ham told his brothers about this incident, and then shielded their eyes from Noah as they covered his nakedness. When the situation was made known to Noah, it prompted him to curse Ham's son (and not Ham), Canaan for the indiscretion.⁴⁴ In this story, a follower of God curses another for displeasing him, breaking away from the guidelines of helpful or positive magic that had been set by the Church.

Flint, Jones, and other historians of Late Antique magic often refer to the Biblical battle between Simon Peter and Simon Magus.⁴⁵ Simon Magus, referred to as just Simon, was demonstrating his magical talents in Samaria. As a result, the locals began referring to Simon as God. Simon Peter and John arrived in Samaria and began baptizing the locals. Simon Magus asked Simon Peter how much he must pay in order to acquire the ability to spread the Holy spirit. Simon Peter declared that a man cannot buy his way into Heaven and turns away from Simon Magus.⁴⁶

The moral of the story of Simon and Peter is that magic is not to be used. Only God can perform miracles and magical acts, not an individual. It also indicates that those who use magic for themselves do not serve God but seek glory and worship for themselves. Magic performed in order to bring glory to oneself, or performed with the assistance of another deity, cannot be tolerated. Stories like this provided the Church with justification and authority for any anti-magic sentiment or laws because they demonstrate that magic not associated with God was dangerous or blasphemous. Additionally, non-sanctioned magic was associated with harming others, or allowing evil spirits, demons, or deities to have control. The magic or miracles allowed by God and the Church were supposedly more positive.

As complex as the Church stance on the use of magic was, or even what magic consisted of, Flint argues that the efforts made by the Church were more about the institutionalization of Christianity in daily lives, and this led to the distrust of anything with magical affiliation.⁴⁷ Magic, however loosely defined, was found in all aspects of life from medical practices, to love potions,

⁴⁴ Genesis 9:20-27.

⁴⁵ Magus is derived from the word *mageuon* found in early recordings of the Book of Acts. It was assigned to Simon as a way to emphasize his use of magic or to refer to him as a magician.

⁴⁶ Acts 8:9-24.

⁴⁷ Flint, "The Demonisation of Magic and Sorcery in Late Antiquity", 270.

to spells that cured impotence. What Flint really argued that by introducing Christianity into pagan societies, Christianity had to embrace certain aspects of paganism to survive, spread, and thrive. Her thesis also assumes that the pagan population was larger than the Christian population, and that the larger pagan population would react violently, or at least negatively, to the introduction of Christianity.

Sources from Late Antiquity do show an integration of pagan and Christian practices as shown through spells, prayers, laws and in the field of medicine. What Flint fails to emphasize is the tremendous power of the Christian Church as well as the spread of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire and Europe. Pagans began experiencing persecution as early as the fourth century under Emperor Constantine I who was behind the destruction of several pagan temples.⁴⁸ The late fourth century saw pagan persecution and anti-pagan laws with severe punishments for those who chose not to adhere to the laws under Theodosius I.⁴⁹

By the year 529, Emperor Justinian I, a strict Christian, initiated the banishment of paganism throughout various parts of the Roman empire. His efforts included the enforcement of anti-pagan laws and sending missionaries.⁵⁰ The Late Antique period also witnesses several instances of vandalism meted on pagan temples and statues. Pagan land was taken, and Christian churches and symbols replaced pagan temples and symbols. Roman emperors, as seen through the efforts of Constantine I, Theodosius I, and Justinian I, and many others, demonstrated the ability of the Roman Empire and the Church to abolish much of pagan practices. The Church had no need to adopt pagan traditions for its survival, despite Flint's claim.

The Late Antique society never completely abandoned magic, though magic was limited in its use, either by law, or because the practices not outlawed so often fell under the guise of religious ritual. Spells became prayers, amulets became tokens, and the scientific aspects of astrology were embraced and recommended by Church fathers. The Church could defend its endorsement and banishment of certain kinds of magic by citing chapters of the Bible or by providing extensive texts of philosophy which examined and explained Christian faith. Additionally, the Church provided guidelines for the use of magic, allowing the useful and the positive to become part of the Church. Flint was correct in arguing that the Church had adopted some pagan practices, and that doing so actively encouraged pagans to embrace Christianity. However, the population of pagans in rural areas was smaller than she imagined, and they were certainly no threat to the power of the Church.

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⁴⁸ W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), Chapter 14.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* Chapter 20.

⁵⁰ W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity*, Chapter 23.

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