

The Renegade Mage's Technomancer Religion Notes, 4th Edition

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Atheism

Classic materialism took a severe blow after Trinity, particularly in the face of magic that appears to directly affect souls and related phenomena. However, the scientific study and analysis of magic and the non-discovery of proof of any traditional deities has allowed the development of “metamaterialism”, which expects there to be “natural thaumaturgical” explanations of “so-called supernatural phenomena.”

Christianity

Eastern Orthodoxy

Eastern Orthodoxy was riven in two by the Manafall. It was the initial public opinion of most of the bishops of in the free world, and the very emphatic opinion of the monastic communities of Mount Athos, that the new magic was forbidden. Under what in the West was generally assumed to be state pressure, it was soon the opinion of the bishops in the Eastern Bloc that “natural magic” was permissible as long as one used it responsibly. The free world churches might have been expected to liberalize as magic became more analytical, but two things instead pushed things in the direction of permanent division.

The first was the long rivalry between the patriarchates of Constantinople and Moscow for prestige. The second was Pope Paul VI declaring responsible magic use “acceptable”. The result was that over the next few years Orthodox opinions on magic fused with opinions on discussing reconciliation with the Roman church (often reversing one or the other), and then lined up on each side of the Constantinople-Moscow fault line. This was particularly true in the United States, where there were dioceses of both the Constantinople and Moscow patriarchates.

When the Patriarch of Moscow declared the Russian Orthodox diocese in North America the autocephalous Orthodox Church in America in 1970, the dispute bubbled over. Mutual excommunications divided the Eastern Orthodox in 1972 between the “Greeks” (the ancient patriarchates of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem, the national churches of Cyprus, Finland, Greece, and Serbia, the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia, and subordinate jurisdictions thereof) and the “Slavs” (the Bulgarian, Czechoslovakian, Georgian, Polish, Romanian, and Russian churches, and the new Orthodox Church in America). These parties eventually wound up labeled the “Ancient Orthodox” (for holding the four ancient patriarchal sees and claiming to uphold ancient dogma on magic) and the “Living Orthodox” (pointing to their larger numbers and their ability to adapt to a changed world).

After the Cold War, it was often hoped that the two branches would reconcile, but the dispute over the practice of magic remained. Soon what had been a North American phenomenon for two decades spread to the Old World; both existing parishes and new congregations started seeking oversight from bishops in the “foreign” communion depending on their opinions of thaumaturgy. The Ancient/Living divide was infused with bad feeling over these defections, and progress at reconciliation halted.

When the Soviet Union was revived, Stalin’s regime suppressed the Ancient Orthodox in its territory (who were mostly under the supervision of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia) and handed their assets over to the Living Orthodox Church (which is now, as it was in the past, under tight KGB supervision).

Ukraine’s Orthodox have split into three rival Living Orthodox groups (two claiming their own patriarchs unrecognized by other Living Orthodox, the third under Moscow until the 2022 invasion and now claiming to be independent) and two groups of Ancient Orthodox (one under Constantinople and one under the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia).

Western Rite (Ancient) Orthodox

In the 1960s, a relatively large number of Roman Catholics, including clergy, reacted to the liturgical changes of Vatican II and the official tolerance of the practice of magic by leaving the church. A substantial number wound up turning to the Western Rite Vicariate under the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, provision for which had been made in an edict of Metropolitan Antony of that archdiocese in 1958. These parishes celebrated the Tridentine Mass in Latin, with a handful of tweaks to match Orthodox theology (called the Liturgy of St. Gregory).

In the 1970s, there was a similar flight from the Episcopal Church when it began ordaining women, and several groups of those who also had been uncomfortable with Episcopal tolerance of thaumaturgy found shelter under the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, using a modified version of the Episcopal 1928 Book of Common Prayer in English (called the Liturgy of St. Tikhon).

For a while, the result was a degree of tension within the Western Rite Vicariate; after all, a substantial part of the motive of the former Catholics had been to avoid “Protestantization”, particularly in liturgy, and now they were organizationally grouped with ex-Protestants performing a modified Protestant liturgy. However, as time passed, the division between the two sub-groups has faded; many parishes in the Vicariate are now dual-language (performing the Liturgy of St. Gregory in both Latin and English), dual-rite (performing both the Liturgy of St. Gregory and the Liturgy of St. Tikhon), or both (performing the Liturgy of St. Gregory in Latin and the Liturgy of St. Tikhon in English).

Mormonism

Under its President in the 1950s and ‘60s, David O. McKay, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints started skeptical of and concerned about the new magical phenomena, but remained formally uncommitted, awaiting a divine revelation on the issue. The short presidencies of Joseph Fielding Smith and Harold B. Lee left the issue unresolved, dumping it on Spencer W. Kimball on December 30, 1973.

Kimball did not long leave the issue unresolved. The Minor Healing and Major Healing spells had been documented by the University of California (Berkeley) in 1961; if anyone at Salt Lake City’s LDS Hospital had been able to perform them in 1973, President Lee’s life could have been saved. This induced Kimball to pray fervently on the issue, and in 1974, the Church announced that a revelation had been received that modern magic, performed with scrupulous avoidance of idolatry and used responsibly, was a permissible tool for the use of mankind.

That did not go over well with some of the more conservative Latter-day Saints, and a fairly large overlapping segment was upset with the 1978 announcement of a revelation that blacks and chimeras were eligible for the priesthood. As a result, the already-extant Apostolic United Brethren movement gained a substantial number of members in the 1970s and early ‘80s.

Rachelites

If you just attended the Sunday morning services at one of the parishes of the Church Militant of the Holy Trinity, you might come away with the impression that you’re at a particularly High Church Episcopalian service. The Rachelite order of worship on Sunday morning follows a fixed liturgy (derived from the 1928 Episcopalian Book of Common Prayer, but with additions such as an Old Testament reading) and uses the Revised Common Lectionary, the officiant wears specialized vestments colored for the liturgical season, and incense is used several times a year. If you’ve got a particular ear for theology and church practice, you might notice Wesleyan elements in the hymns (and possibly the homily) and conclude you’re in an unusually liturgical Methodist church.

If you just attended the Sunday or Wednesday evening services, on the other hand, you’d likely conclude that the Church Militant of the Holy Trinity is a particularly spontaneous Pentecostal sect, of the traditions that spawned the epithet “Holy Roller”. There’s no fixed order of worship, and the central feature is ecstatic visions brought on by singing and chanting.

In addition to encouraging all members to attend all three worship services, the Rachelite church also encourages attendance at all-congregation meals (usually held in a cafeteria on church grounds) on Thursday evenings and after Sunday morning services, membership in one or more Bible Study groups (usually held in rooms on church grounds on Monday or Tuesday evenings), and regular participation in individual confession on Saturday afternoons (much like Roman Catholic practice, with confessionals).

As laid out in *Technomancer*, Rachelites believe magic should be embraced to “smite the enemies of God and man”. This is not purely in the sense of using force against the unrighteous; social evils are also among the “enemies”, and modern Rachelite rhetoric about them particularly resembles Methodist preaching of a century ago. Means to combat the evils are also not limited to magic; the church is happy to have non-mage members join the police and military, while pushing members to abstain entirely from alcohol and gambling “to fortify the whole community against the evils of alcoholism and gambling addiction”.

In addition to abstention from alcohol, for spiritual and community-building reasons the church encourages members to eat vegetarian on Fridays (vegan on Fridays in Lent), to abstain from meat (but not fish) the entirety of Lent, and to fast from dawn to dusk on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.

The Church Militant of the Holy Trinity opposes abortion and sexual activity outside of marriage, while it defines marriage as the union of one man and one woman. However, it accepts both contraception (particularly favoring the alchemical elixir of birth control) and magical (Alter Body) sex changes. The church licenses and ordains women as preachers, presbyters, and bishops “in the tradition of Sarah Crosby, Helenor Davisson, and Rachel Curwin”.

Qigong

The word “qigong” was coined in China in 1949 to refer to a system of physical exercise derived from many traditional Chinese practices (including daoyin, xingqi, and kung fu) stripped of traditional mystical, philosophical, and religious content. As such, it limped along as an adjunct to rehabilitative medicine, under tight Communist Party supervision and control, throughout the lifetime of Mao Zedong.

The popularity of qigong grew rapidly after Mao's death in 1976, in part because of the general relaxation of controls with the end of the Cultural Revolution, and in part because of the “rehabilitation of the mystics” aimed at jump-starting Chinese technomagical development. The practice of qigong quite quickly was reassociated with mystical, philosophical, and religious ideas, split into a wide variety of rival schools with revered, charismatic leaders who claimed (and, occasionally, had) supernatural powers.

The government became concerned that the schools were becoming centers for the organization of the disaffected and a threat to the stability of the state (as had happened with various similar groups many times in Chinese history). It initially tried to control this by setting up a centralized National Qigong Science and Research Organization in 1985. When this proved insufficient, in 1999, the government took stricter measures and explicitly banned the groups that concerned it the most, including Falun Gong and Zhong Gong.

Since 1999, qigong in China has been under the strict control of the People's Liberation Army. The Army is emphasizing scientific study into how to produce adepts in mana-dependent skills and research into developing new ones. (What mystical elements remain are explained in terms of Western scientific thaumatology, while philosophical and religious content has been largely reduced to an emphasis on duty to the state and its leaders.) The ultimate hope is that the methods can be extended to train non-mages as wizards. The PLA qigong project has recently added training subjects in the new “zapps” (see *GURPS Magic: The Least of All Spells* and the *Technomancer Spell Notes for 4th Edition*) in the hopes that extended practice can turn non-mages into mages.

Falun Gong

Li Hongzhi

Zhong Gong

After Zhong Gong was outlawed in China, founder Zhang Hongbao escaped along with a number of his eighth-level adepts (and sundry other followers) to Taiwan. There they rebuilt the Qilin Group, a web of interlocking businesses offering franchises for martial arts dojos, physical fitness centers, esoteric medicine clinics, massage parlors, feng shui design and consulting, corporate team building, management training seminars, and other fields all based on the Zhong Gong approach to qi cultivation.

Outsiders have criticized Zhong Gong and the related businesses variously as a cult, a scam, and “McEnlightenment”, but it has become reasonably popular in Taiwan and other parts of the Sinitic world, and it does seem to produce as many adepts in mana-dependent skills as rival systems.

Satanism & Diabolism

The physical manifestation of actual, malevolent demons quite discouraged “atheistic Satanism”, where the Devil was used as a symbol of the rejection of conventional religion or mores by freethinkers to *épater les bourgeois*. Instead, following the lead of Anton LaVey (who, in Merlin, founded the Church of Set in 1966), they generally pick an outsider deity from an ancient polytheistic system.

However, diabolism – actual demon worship – does exist, whether initiated by humans who feel alienated or fostered by the demons (particularly malebranche). The Manson cult was an early example of this phenomenon, which briefly exploded across America in the 1980s, triggering the “Satanic Panic”. In general, diabolist groups make efforts to hide their existence from the authorities; even in countries where robust religious freedom laws leave Satanism technically legal, known groups are infiltrated and watched carefully by the government.

One effect of the Satanic Panic was the major players in the music industry, under pressure from groups like the Parents Music Resource Center, adopting a (nominally) voluntary code of conduct against “diabolical” elements in lyrics, music videos, and album covers. (In countries with less-robust protections for free speech, the bans were backed by force of law, much like laws against Nazi propaganda.) The code has subsequently been adopted by most music download and streaming sites, which means such “Satanic” music as exists is produced by “underground” bands and swapped on the dark web.