

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states, "All forms of divination are to be rejected: recourse to Satan or demons, conjuring up the dead or other practices falsely supposed to 'unveil' the future. Consulting horoscopes, astrology, palm reading, interpretation of omens and lots, the phenomena of clairvoyance, and recourse to mediums all conceal a desire for power over time, history, and, in the last analysis, other human beings, as well as a wish to conciliate hidden powers. They contradict the honor, respect, and loving fear that we owe to God alone" (CCC 2116).

The pagan world was dominated by belief in astrology. Pagans believed that the stars were divinities, or that they were controlled by divinities. Apollo was the god of the sun, his sister Diana was the goddess of the moon, and the known planets were named after gods as well (Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn). Because of this common pagan belief, the Old Testament contains repeated injunctions against star-worship (Deut. 4:19, 17:3; 2 Kgs. 17:16, 21:3-5, 23:4; Jer. 8:2, 19:12-13; Zeph. 1:4-6).

In the New Testament age, astrologers taught that all things were in the grip of Fate, which could assign one destiny to one man and another destiny to another. Fate was extremely powerful and sometimes was even said to rule the gods. However, what destiny Fate would assign to a man could be determined by reading the stars.

Today some Christians are influenced by revived paganism in the form of the New Age movement. Some even suggest that Christianity originally held many occult beliefs, such as astrology. But the early Christians, like the early Jews, were vehemently opposed to astrology, even attributing it to demonic origin.

The Church Fathers were willing to impose strong sanctions against astrology to protect their flocks. In A.D. 120, the noted mathematician Aquila Ponticus was excommunicated from the Church at Rome for astrological heresies. In the quotes below, Augustine records that such sanctions were still in force in his day, three centuries later,

and could result in a person's being excommunicated.

TATIAN THE SYRIAN

"[Under the influence of demons] men form the material of their apostasy. For, having shown them a plan of the position of the stars, like dice-players, they introduce Fate, a flagrant injustice. For the judge and the judged are made so by Fate, the murderers and the murdered, the wealthy and the needy—[all are] the offspring of the same Fate" (*Address to the Greeks* 8 [A.D. 170]).

"Such are the demons; these are they who laid down the doctrine of Fate. Their fundamental principle was the placing of animals in the heavens [as constellations] . . . these they dignified with celestial honor, in order that they might themselves be thought to remain in heaven and, by placing the constellations there, might make to appear rational the irrational course of life on earth. Thus the high-spirited and he who is crushed with toil, the temperate and the intemperate, the indigent and the wealthy, are what they are simply from the controllers of their nativity. For the delineation of the zodiacal circle is the work of the 'gods'. . . . But we are superior to Fate, and instead of wandering demons, we have learned to know one Lord, who wanders not" (ibid., 9).

TERTULLIAN

"We observe among the arts also some professions liable to the charge of idolatry. Of astrologers, there should be no speaking even; but since one in these days has challenged us, defending on his own behalf perseverance in that profession, I will use a few words. I allege not that he honors idols, whose names he has inscribed on the heaven, to whom he has attributed all God's power. . . . One proposition I lay down: that those angels, the deserters of God [demons] . . . were likewise the discoverers of this curious art [astrology], on that

account also condemned by God" (*Idolatry* 9 [A.D. 211]).

THE RECOGNITIONS OF CLEMENT

"Therefore the astrologers, being ignorant of such mysteries, think that these things [the disasters brought about when demons inspire human sin] happen by the courses of the heavenly bodies; hence also, in their answers to those who go to them and consult them as to future things, they are deceived in very many instances. Nor is it to be wondered at, for they are not prophets; but, by long practice, the authors of errors find a sort of refuge in those things by which they were deceived, and introduce certain 'climacteric periods,' that they may pretend a knowledge of uncertain things. For they represent these 'climacterics' as times of danger, in which one sometimes is destroyed, sometimes is not destroyed, not knowing that it is not the course of the stars but the operation of demons that regulates these things; and those demons, being anxious to confirm the error of astrology, deceive men to sin by mathematical calculations, so that when they suffer the punishment of sin, either by the permission of God or by legal sentence, the astrologer may seem to have spoken the truth" (*The Recognitions of Clement* 9:12 [A.D. 221]).

"[A]s usually happens when men see unfavorable dreams, and can make nothing certain out of them, when any event occurs, then they adapt what they saw in the dream to what has occurred; so also is [the] mathematics [of astrology]. For before anything happens, nothing is declared with certainty; but after something has happened, they gather the causes of the event. And thus often, when they have been at fault, and the thing has fallen out otherwise, they take the blame to themselves, saying that it was such and such a star which opposed, and that they did not see it; not knowing that their error does not proceed from their unskillfulness in their art, but from the inconsistency of the whole system. . . . But we who have learned the reason of this mystery

know the cause since, having freedom of will, we sometimes oppose our desires and sometimes yield to them. And therefore the issue of human doings is uncertain, because it depends upon freedom of will. . . . And this is why ignorant astrologers have invented to themselves the talk about 'climacterics' as their refuge in uncertainties" (ibid., 10:12).

HIPPOLYTUS

"How impotent [the astrologers'] system is for comparing the forms and dispositions of men with names of stars! For we know that those originally conversant with such investigations have called the stars by names given reference to propriety of signification and facility for future recognition. But what similarity is there of these [constellations] with the likeness of animals, or what community of nature are regards conduct and energy, that one should allege that a person born in Leo should be irascible [like a lion] and that one born in Virgo moderate [like a virgin] or one born in Cancer wicked [like a crab]?" (*Refutation of All Heresies* 4:37 [A.D. 228]).

"It has been easily made evident to all that the heresy of the Peratae is altered in name only from the [art] of the astrologers. And the rest of the books of these contain the same method, if it were agreeable to anyone to wade through them all" (ibid., 5:10).

LACTANTIUS

"[D]emons are the enemies and harassers of men, and on this account [the sorcerer Hermes] Trismegistus calls them wicked angels; so far was he from being ignorant that from heavenly beings they were corrupted, and began to be earthly. These were the inventors of astrology, and of soothsaying, and divination, and those productions which are called oracles, and necromancy, and the art of magic, and whatever other evil practices these men exercise, either openly or in secret" (*Divine Institutes* 2:16-17 [A.D. 307]).

"[Demons] brought to light astrology, and augury, and divination; and though these things are in themselves false, yet they themselves, the authors of evils, so govern and regulate them that they are believed to be true. . . . Thus by their frauds they have drawn darkness over the human race, that truth might be oppressed, and the name of the supreme and matchless God might be forgotten" (*Epitome of the Divine Institutes* 28 [A.D. 317]).

SYNOD OF LAODICEA

"They who are of the priesthood or of the clergy shall not be magicians, enchanters, [planetary] 'mathematicians,' or astrologers" (Canon 36 [A.D. 362]).

ATHANASIUS

"They [astrologers] have fabricated books which they call books of [astrological] tables, in which they show stars, to which they have given the names of saints. And therein of a truth they have inflicted on themselves a double reproach, those who have written such books, because they have perfected themselves in a lying and contemptible science [astrology], and as to the ignorant and simple, they have led them astray by evil thoughts concerning the right faith established in truth and upright in the presence of God" (*Easter Letter* 39:1 [A.D. 367]).

BASIL THE GREAT

"[T]hose who overstep the borders, making the words of Scripture ['And God said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens . . . and let them be for signs and for seasons,"' (Gen. 1:14)] their apology for the art of casting nativities [horoscopes], pretend that our lives depend upon the motion of the heavenly bodies, and thus the Chaldeans read in the planets that which will happen to us. By these very simple words 'let them be for signs,' they understand neither the variations of the weather nor the change of seasons; they only see in them, at the will of their imagination, the distribution of human

destinies. What do they say in reality? When the planets cross in the signs of the zodiac, certain figures formed by their meeting give birth to certain destinies, and others produce different destinies" (*The Six Days Work* 6:5 [A.D. 370]).

JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

"Let us show forth by our actions all excellencies of conduct, and kindle abundantly the fire of virtue. For 'you are lights,' he [Paul] says, 'shining in the midst of the world' [Phil. 2:15]. . . . And in fact a deep night oppresses the whole world. This is what we have to dispel and dissolve. It is night not among heretics and among Greeks only, but also in the multitude on our side, in respect of doctrines and of life. For many [Catholics] entirely disbelieve the resurrection; many fortify themselves with the horoscope; many adhere to superstitious observances, and to omens, and auguries, and presages" (*Homilies on First Corinthians* 4:11 [A.D. 392]).

AUGUSTINE

"Now I had also repudiated the lying divination and impious absurdities of the astrologers . . . [and] I turned my thoughts to those that are born twins, who generally come out of the womb so near one to another that the small distance of time between them (however much force [astrologers] may contend that it has in the nature of things) cannot be noted by human observation or be expressed in those [planetary] figures which the astrologer is to examine that he may pronounce the truth. Nor can they be true; for looking into the same figures he must have foretold the same of Esau and Jacob, whereas the same did not happen to them. He must therefore speak falsely, or if truly, then, looking into the same figures he must not speak the same things. Not then by art but by chance would he speak truly" (*Confessions* 7:6:8–10 [A.D. 400]).

"To whom then must we make an answer first—to the heretics or to the astrologers? For both come

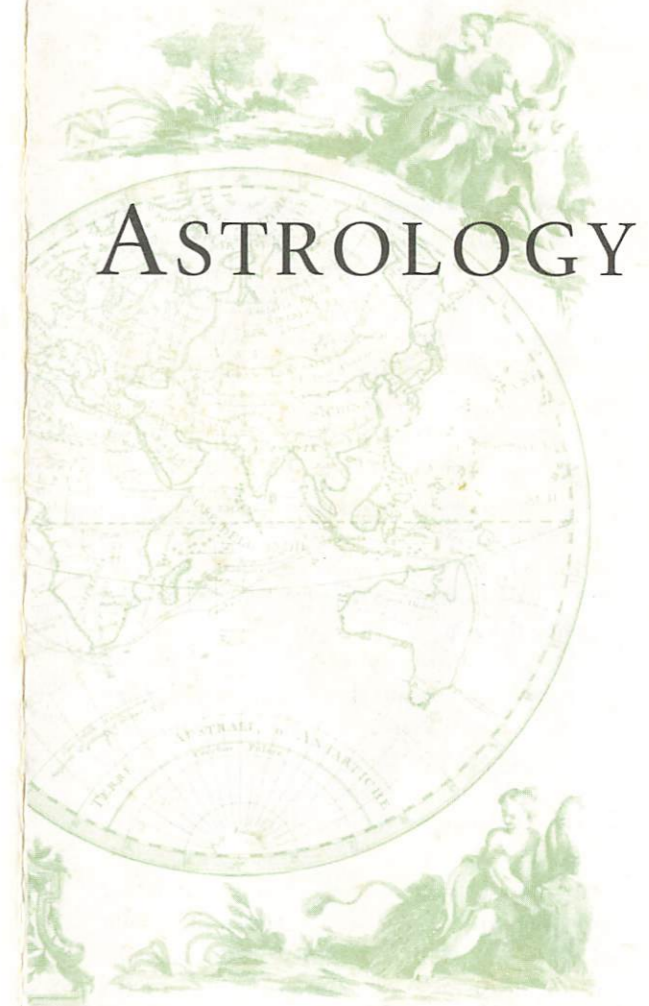
from the serpent, and desire to corrupt the Church's virginity of heart, which she holds in undefiled faith" (*Homilies on John* 8:10 [A.D. 416]).

"[E]very man twists for himself a rope by his sins. . . . Who makes a long rope? He who adds sin to sin. . . . One has committed a theft. So that he may not be found out to have committed it, he seeks the astrologer [to prove his innocence]. It was enough to have committed the theft. Why will you add sin to sin? Behold! Two sins [are] committed! When you are forbidden to go to the astrologer, you revile the bishop. Behold! Three sins! When you hear it said of you, 'Cast him forth from the Church,' you say, 'I will go to the party of Donatus [the Donatist schism]. Behold! You add a fourth sin. The rope is growing. Be afraid of the rope. It is good for you to be corrected here, when you are scourged with it, that it may not be said of you at the last, 'Bind his hands and feet, and cast him forth into outer darkness' [Matt. 22:13]. For 'with the cords of his own sins everyone is bound' [Prov. 5:22]" (*ibid.*, 10:5).

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ASTROLOGY