

The Early Church Fathers on Astrology / Divination

The Church clearly teaches us in the catechism that practicing astrology as well as other forms of divination is wrong. In paragraph 2116 we read: "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." That the Church has always taught this is also very clear.

Didache

Be neither an enchanter, nor an astrologer, nor a purifier, nor be willing to look at these things, for out of all these idolatry is engendered (3 [A.D. 70]).

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).

Irenaeus

The devil, however, since he is an apostate angel, is able, as he was in the beginning, to lead astray and to deceive the mind of man for the transgressing of God's commands. And little by little he can darken the hearts of those who would try to serve him, to the point that, forgetting the true God, they adore him as if he were God (*Against Heresies* 5:24:3 [A.D. 189]).

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]).

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]).

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]).

Basil

(concerning the zodiac) Then both those who give themselves up to this imaginary science and those who listen to them open-mouthed, as if they could learn from them the future, are supremely ridiculous (*Hexaemeron*, Homily 6:5 [circa A.D. 350]).

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]).

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]).