

precession of the equinoxes i.e. the fact that over time the positions of the stars appear to shift through the sky. Horoscopes are inherently imprecise, he added, because of the difficulty or impossibility of observing the sky at the precise moment of a birth. Nor can astrology explain the radically different behaviors and fates of individuals born at exactly the same time nor the similarities of those born at different times. As for the problems in observation at the time of birth, Hippolytus thought it must be even more difficult to do so at the time of conception.

Two other early Christian thoughts were that (1) if people could readily ascertain the future from observing the stars, God would not have sent the Old Testament prophets, and (2) if future events are already fixed in the stars and cannot be changed, prayer is useless because nothing can alter this future, even though God has commanded prayer.

There is one confusing ambiguity in the early literature, which is a short writing from the late second century by Origen's teacher, which quotes a heretic and an orthodox speaker in a fashion that renders it impossible to tell who said what. However, even the heretic believed that whatever the power of the stars over non-Christians who believe in astrology, Jesus has liberated us from their power.

Other than this, before A.D. 250 no Christian writer whose writings have been preserved was in favor of astrology. Nor was ancient Christian condemnation of astrology confined to a small group or a limited area. An Assyrian (Iraqi), an Egyptian, a Greek, an Italian, a Syrian, and a Tunisian, whether in their home countries or in Armenia, France, Israel or Turkey, with one accord over three

centuries clearly indicated that astrology has no place in the Christian life. Unanimity at such an early date and in so many geographic areas indicates that this teaching was universal ("catholic") and could have originated only with Jesus Himself.

Another reason for not following astrology was not mentioned by the ancients: some individuals completely rely on their astrologer for their every decision, confide their most intimate secrets to them, and accept their word as final. This relationship used to be that between layperson and pastor, and may still be between patient and psychiatrist, both of which professionals receive many years of post-secondary education—qualifications most astrologers lack. For the depth and commitment of these individuals, astrology is really a religion in itself, a religion incompatible with Christianity.

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The Evangelization Station

P.O. Box 267

Angels Camp, California 95222, USA

Telephone: 209-728-5598

E-mail: evangelization@earthlink.net

www.evangelizationstation.com

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What About Astrology?

David W. T. Brattston

Why do many churches warn their members against astrology?

Astrology claims to predict a person's character and future by consulting the positions of the planets and stars at the moment of his/her birth. At first sight, the theory behind astrology seems reasonable enough. Because the earth's weather affects human actions and events, the stars and planets exert a decisive influence if they alter weather. The moon causes tides, which may delay or hasten a boat's sailing to fight in a naval battle. Sunspot activity can disrupt communications and thus interfere with or prevent a telephone call crucial to a personal, commercial or military endeavor. However, the study of such influence is more properly scientific astronomy, with strict and repeatable observation and testing, rather than traditional astrology with all its lore and unproved assumptions.

The sciences, such as astronomy, require taking data only from a huge number of observations and experiments before a theory or system is formulated, the devising and application of tests to prove the theory incorrect, and continual monitoring of new data to refine or disprove the scientific theory or method. For an article to be published in a scholarly scientific journal, its observations must be repeated by another scientist. By contrast, astrology relies only on methods and principles handed down through the millennia back to a primitive time in human development. The most favorable results of astrological predictions and analyses show

that they are correct only about 50% of the time—the same as flipping a coin.

Nor is there any single astrological method or school. Some astrologers accept different assumptions—and they are only assumptions, not proven evidence yielded by rigorous observation. For instance, there is no agreement on the length of the year, some astrologers considering its beginning to be when the earth is in the same spot in its orbit in relation to the sun as it was the start of the year before, and others insisting that it begins when the sun is in exactly the same place relative to the stellar background. Hence, a different baseline and different calculations.

Another example is that most astrologers seek guidance from only those planets known in antiquity and ignore those discovered since the 17th century. What greater influence on humans might Uranus, Neptune and Pluto exert than the only planets these astrologers consult? Unknown until the 20th century, Pluto was ranked as a full planet until 2006, when it lost this status. Does this downgrading change its influence on earthly events? Moreover, Pluto alternates with Neptune in proximity to the earth, which theoretically should vary the strength of its influence from time to time. Yet most astrologers do not take these important considerations into account.

And all astrologers forget that the light we see from heavenly bodies indicates only apparent location. All stars—many of which are billions upon billions of miles away—only appear to be in relation to the moon, sun and planets because their light was emitted before the earth came into being and, due to the limited speed of light, are not really in this relationship at the time of a particular birth.

The church rightly forbids its members to participate in astrology, and has done so from its very beginning. Christian writers before the middle of the third century indicate it taught this in Christianity's foundational period, and also give additional reasons why astrology is to be avoided.

The first known Christian to write on astrology was Tatian the Assyrian. In A.D. 167 he opposed astrology because it contradicts the Christian belief in free-will and the responsibility of the individual, a common theme among the early Christian writers on astrology. If a person's actions were controlled by the stars, he has no free will and thus should not be praised for good deeds nor be accountable for his sins. In Tatian's time many people gave up all attempts to be moral or compassionate or to improve their lot because astrology teaches that a person's good and bad actions are of no avail because the stars determine what will happen or indicate events and actions that cannot be changed. Tatian also regarded astrology as inconsistent with the doctrine that God is permanent, the rock of ages, and the same yesterday, today and forever rather than constantly moving like a star or forever wandering like a planet.

Around A.D. 200, the church father Terullian in what is now Tunisia also opposed astrology because (1) it does not give glory to God but to the stars, (2) that "men, presuming that we are disposed of by the unchangeable commands of the stars, think on that account that God is not to be sought after", and (3) naming celestial bodies after pagan gods and referring to them in horoscopes violates the prohibitions in Exodus 23.17, Joshua 23.7, Psalm 16.4, Hosea 2.17 and Zechariah 13.2

against speaking the names of deities other than the true God.

Bardesan (A.D. 154 to 222) lived in Syria and Armenia. He wrote a book, which criticized astrology not so much on religious grounds as disproved it from common observations. Bardesan argued that the theory that humans are controlled by stars and planets is disproved by the facts that (1) there are different laws and modes of behavior in different countries regulating citizens born under all signs of the zodiac, (2) that the king or legislature changes these laws from time to time, and (3) that crimes are nevertheless committed against them. If the stars determined there was to be a particular law or custom, they would hardly have decreed that they be altered or violated.

Hippolytus was a bishop in Italy about the time of Bardesan. In eighteen chapters of arguments against astrology in one of his books, he demonstrated that its predictions are woefully inaccurate in practice, pointed out the contradictions between the various schools of astrologers, and questioned why they base all their calculations on the moment of a person's birth when life really begins at conception.

Origen was the most outstanding Christian teacher and Bible scholar of the first half of the third century. Origen taught that one of the plagues that struck Egypt in the time of Moses symbolized the astrologers' practice of observing "days, and months, and seasons, and years" (Galatians 4.10), seeking for signs and relying on the movements of the stars.

Like Bardesan, Origen opposed astrology on secular, scientific, grounds in addition to religious and philosophical ones. Astrologers, Origen noted, fail to take into account the