

The using of incantations (recited or chanted formulas of words or sounds) and the wearing of written words on a person, in the belief that such things have a protective power, are acts of superstition. Even sacred words and blessed objects must be used in the spirit of reverence to God, and never in the way of amulets of luck pieces.

Tempting God

To tempt a person is to put him to a test. To tempt God is to try, by word or deed, to test God's knowledge or power. Sometimes, indeed, the effort is not so much to test God, as a presumptuous reliance on God to supply what a person can readily do himself. Thus a person who refuses to take medicine when he is seriously sick, and expects God to cure him, is guilty, in some measure, of tempting God. To expect miracles when no human means are at hand to meet an extreme situation is not to tempt God. However, to expect miracles to supply for one's own lack of effort, or for the sake of enjoying a kind of spectacular exhibition, is tempting God.

Therefore, tempting God is a sin. It usually involves a doubt of God's knowledge and power, and seeks to be sure about these—it puts God to the test. It is manifest that there is a wild inordinateness in this spectacle of a creature setting himself up to test and judge the infinite Creator upon who the creature essentially depends. However, one must not too quickly assume that what seems at first sight to be the sin of tempting God is actually a sin. When, for example, the apostles asked God to confirm their words with signs, (that is, with miracles) they were not tempting God; they had no doubt of his knowledge and power; they sought no proof for themselves; they wished God to make manifest his truth to unbelievers, and to accredit his messengers. The apostles' petition came from

full faith, and loving reliance on God; it did not spring from ignorance, doubt, or arrogance, as the sin of tempting God always does.

Tempting God is a sin against the virtue of religion because it is a direct act of irreverence towards God.

It does not seem that tempting God is so grievous an irreverence as superstition. The person who tempts God manifests a doubt of God's knowledge and power, and this may be a passing and temporary thing. However, a person given to superstition is usually stepped and confirmed in irreligious error. As lasting irreverent error is worse than passing irreverent doubt, so superstition is worse than tempting God.

Reference:

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Superstition and Tempting God

Superstition is a vice opposed to religion. It offers divine worship to whom it should not, or it offers divine worship to God in an unworthy manner. The name superstition comes from the Latin *superstes*, which means “a survivor.” It suggests that what are called superstitions are survivors or “holdovers” from the false pre-Christian religions known collectively as paganism.

Superstition takes various forms: (a) *idolatry* gives divine honor to a creature; (b) *divination* consults demons, thus attributing divine powers to creatures; (c) *false observances* are outer expressions of the belief that divine powers are found in certain creatures.

Kinds of superstition

Sometimes the truths and practices of the true religion are misinterpreted or misused, and this is a kind of superstition. It is true doctrine, for instance, that the souls in purgatory are helped by our prayers. However, it would be superstition to believe that a certain formula or prayer, or a certain number of prayers, gives absolute assurance of the deliverance of a certain soul from purgatory.

However, the good and useful practices of Catholics—in penitential acts, for instance, and in using medals, scapulars, and other blessed objects—are sometimes turned into superstitious usages by mistaken persons who invest such practices with a kind of magical power, instead of using them according to the mind of the Church, as means of stirring up reverence and devotion to God in their own hearts.

Idolatry

Idolatry is that form of superstition, which sets up false gods, and pays divine honor to what is not divine. St. Augustine says, “Anything invented by man for making and worshiping idols, or for giving divine worship to a creature, or to any part of a creature...is superstitious” (*De Doct. Christ.* II). The superstition here indicated is that of *idolatry*.

It is certainly a sin to worship idols, outwardly or inwardly. It is right to give honor to superiors, but not to regard them as gods. Idolatry is utterly insubordinate; it is flatly contrary to reason; it conflicts with religion; it is a thing evil *in itself*. Hence, idolatry is never to be tolerated. We must reject the error of those heretics who say that, in times of persecution, it suffices to hold the true religion in the heart and, for the sake of freedom from trouble, to take part in the outward worship of idols.

It is a sin, and in itself is the gravest kind of sin, to practice idolatry. For it is directly against God, like hatred of God, which we have called the worse sin in its kind. Idolatry would upset the order of the universe by ascribing universal control and absolute power to a creature. Some sins may be worse than idolatry because of the contempt for God and his law that exists in the sinner’s heart, but no sin is worse *in itself*.

Men cause idolatry because of their excessive affections, inordinate loyalties, too high an esteem for artistic objects, and also by ignorance. Scripture says, “For through the vanity of men they [idols] entered the world, and therefore their speedy end has been planned” (Wis. 14:14). A further cause of idolatry is found in the solicitation of demons who offer themselves to be adored.

Divinations

Divination is an effort to know the future by using superstitious means. It attributes to creatures the power of knowing, or disclosing the future absolutely, whereas this power

belongs to God alone. Therefore, divination is always a sin.

Divination often takes the form (indeed, this is usual) of an appeal to demons or devils for knowledge of the future, or for knowledge of what one should do now to achieve good or avoid trouble in the future.

There are three major classes of divinations: direct invoking of demons; reading auguries (observing and interpreting omens for guidance); using other means of reading the future (dreams, necromancy or pretend apparitions, utterances of the dead, etc.).

The invoking of demons is unlawful, for it (a) involves an implicit pact with an evil spirit; (b) results in what is prejudicial to man’s salvation.

Divination by the stars (astrology) is a vain practice, for heavenly bodies do not determine man’s future. Besides, this is a practice into which evil spirits readily enter to find gullible victims for further bad influencing. Hence, divination by the stars is sinful.

Divination by dreams is also unlawful. God can indeed make use of dreams and turn them into revealing visions. However, unless God makes manifest the character of a dream as a revelation, it is wrong to attach to the dream a prophetic value. Only when dreams are accepted as things supernatural and prophetic are they a variety of superstition, which is of divination.

Auguries, omens, use of external superstitious practices as means of getting knowledge or guidance, are all forms of divination, and share its foolish and sinful character. The evil of using such things is in the assumption that the future *depends* on them. To read the natural signs of causes now in operation is not superstitious. Thus, to predict tomorrow’s weather from the clouds, or currents of air, is not divination.

To draw lots in the sharing of goods, or in determining the winner of a prize, is not

divination. But to draw lots to determine which course of action to pursue, with the assumption that fated necessity rules lives, and that somehow the chance selection of a card or the drawing of a straw will indicate which one is fated to enjoy or endure, is divination, and in consequence, is foolish, unreasonable, and sinful.

Superstitious observances

It is futile and sinful to dabble in what is called *magic*, and to use charms, formulas of speech or other devices, to obtain occult knowledge or to control events by evoking occult powers. To do such things is to employ superstitious observances. Of course, the magic mentioned here is not the skilled trickery of an entertainer, often called a magician, who diverts us with prestidigitation and legerdemain (sleight of hand); his tricks are not superstitious practices. The magic we speak of as superstition is what people commonly call *black magic*. This sort of thing debases the mind, dishonors God, and opens the door to diabolical intervention.

The carrying or wearing of health charms, good luck pieces, and the like, is, when done with serious intent of profiting by their use, a great evil; for such practice involves a belief in some supernatural force other than God, which gives to the object used a magical power. This belief is superstition, and is a sin against religion.

Fortune telling is a superstitious and unlawful practice, whether it is done by consulting a person, or by using cards, reading tea leaves, or looking in a crystal ball, or employing other inept and futile observances. Similarly, it is superstition to give serious belief to the omens of luck, good or bad, such as horseshoes, four-leaf clovers, the breaking of a mirror, seeing a black cat, passing under a ladder, and so on.