

## **ASTROLOGY AND EARLY CHRISTIANITY**

### **Nick Campion**

### **Notes**

#### **Orthodox Christian Theology**

(NB Orthodox in the sense of conventional, not the Orthodox Church)

- Christianity came about as the result of a unique revelation, itself developing out of the unique nature of Judaism, founded on a series of previous unique revelations, e.g.. to Noah and Abraham.
- All previous belief systems were superseded by Christianity
- Only Christianity is true - all other religions are false.
- There is one God.
- The cosmos is essentially dualistic, polarised between God and Satan, good and evil, body and spirit, heaven and hell, eternal life and eternal damnation.
- Humanity was alienated from God as a result of the Fall (Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden)
- Humanity's purpose is therefore to return to God, i.e., worship and obey him, secure personal salvation and prepare the way for Christ's second coming.

#### **Orthodox Christian Cosmology**

- God created the entire universe.
- God's creation is continuous (unlike Platonic and Aristotelian God, who ceased work once the creation had been accomplished).
- He is transcendent - i.e. can move through the creation but is essentially above and separate to it.  
'Heaven is my throne  
and the earth is my footstool'(Isaiah 66.1)

The sharp distinction between the creator and the creation is unusual in ancient theology. In general the creator(s) was/were imminent in the creation, which was animated by him/her/them.

#### **Historical context**

##### **1. Background**

- Pervasiveness of polytheism and astral worship in the Near East.
- Introduction of Persian ideas after the 6th/5th c BCE, esp. the independent existence of evil (in Judaism God is the source all things, hence also of 'evil')
- Spread of Hellenistic culture after conquests of Alexander the Great, 330 BCE - esp. Platonism, Stoicism (God is distant geometer/architect to be understood/approached through reason, philosophy - the logos. Stars = divine. Creator manifested through the creation) 2nd c BCE - statue of Zeus Olympios in the Temple
- Development of existing Jewish apocalyptic tradition in 2nd century BCE: Book of Daniel

- Development of Gnosticism/Hermeticism: often pessimistic view of the cosmos, stars can be 'gaolers' of the spirit in body.
- Judaism an evangelising religion
- Development of astrological tradition within Judaism (Dead Sea Scrolls)

## 2. First century

- Politics: Roman control fuels Jewish apocalyptic but many Jews not revolutionary (St Paul = Roman citizen)
- Culture: Hellenisation (100 Greek cities in 1st c Palestine). (See Hengel, Martin, in collaboration with Christoph Marksches, *The 'Hellenization' of Judaea in the First Century after Christ*, London: SCM Press 1989.)
- Bible: no standard version of Old Testament texts.<sup>1</sup>
- Religion: No single Jewish orthodoxy.
- Calendar: Some Jews (Essenes?) move Sabbath to Sunday<sup>2</sup>
- Astrology: Babylonian and Persian traditions evident in Dead Sea Scrolls; Hellenistic astrology - Dorotheus of Sidon (NB St. Paul almost certainly travelled to Rome via Sidon).
- Split between Jewish Christians led by James, Jesus' brother, who wished to continue Jewish law, and St. Paul, who wished to compromise Jewish law in pursuit of Gentile converts. Jewish Christians die out.
- Christianity adopts Persian dualism - God v Satan.

## 3. Second-fourth centuries

- Separation from Judaism: 66-70 CE Rebellion against Rome culminates in defeat and destruction of the Temple in 70. This was the critical event in the separation of Christianity from Judaism. 132-135 Rebellion against Rome culminates in second defeat and ban on Jews entering Jerusalem more than once a year: the diaspora.
- Christianity takes over evangelising role which has been abandoned by Judaism
- Christianity appeals to the poor/slaves and admits women.
- Christianity develops structure - network of churches and administration
- No single Christian doctrine - proliferation of rival teachings.
- Christianity state religion - Constantine (306-337) - Edict of Milan (313) proclaimed equal rights for all religions and restored confiscated property to Christians; Council of Nicaea (first church council), 325, designed to establish single doctrine - Athanasian creed - Christ not of

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<sup>1</sup> Magness Jodi, *The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Cambridge and Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans 2002, p. 35.

<sup>2</sup> Weber, Max, *The Sociology of Religion*, trans. Ephraim Fischhoff, 4th edn., Boston: Beacon Press 1963, p. 71: 'A sharp differentiation of Christianity from Judaism was produced by the Christian choice of the day of the sun god as a day of rest, although this choice might possibly be accounted for by the Christian reception of the soteriological\* mythos of mystagogic Beae Eastern Salvation doctrines of solar religion'. (\*salvation)

same substance as God, therefore not divine and eternal, but human (Arius).

- Rivals - Mithraism, Sol Invictus - Elagabalus (Heliogabalus) 218-222, Aurelian 270-275).

## New Testament Cosmology

### Hermetic context

The New Testament needs to be read in the context of the religious developments taking place from the 2nd century BCE onwards, especially the development of Gnosticism and Hermeticism. One of the texts from the *Corpus Hermeticum*, the 'Poimandres', (according to one theory, meaning Shepherd of Men), subtitled 'On the Power and Wisdom of God', was important because it was believed to have dated back to Moses and its philosophy appeared to link to Graeco-Roman wisdom in the holy scriptures. This text's imagery resembles that in various Old and New Testament books. The use of the 'Word', Logos, in John's gospel is a case in point.

6. Then from that Light, a certain Holy Word joined itself unto Nature, and out flew the pure and unmixed Fire from the moist Nature upward on high; it is exceeding Light, and Sharp, and Operative withal. And the Air which was also light, followed the Spirit and mounted up to Fire (from the Earth and the Water) insomuch that it seemed to hang and depend upon it.

7. And the Earth and the Water stayed by themselves so mingled together, that the Earth could not be seen for the Water, but they were moved, because of the Spiritual Word that was carried upon them.

(Everard, John, *The Corpus Hermeticum, The Divine Pymander in XVII books, The Second Book--Poemanders*, London 1650. This was translated by John Everard from the Ficino Latin translation, [www.levity.com/alchemy/corpherhm.html](http://www.levity.com/alchemy/corpherhm.html).)

These two passages suggest (a) that Hermeticism drew on Judaism and that (b) Christianity drew on Hermeticism.

We should also be aware of links between Christian and Jewish thought aside from that represented in the Bible. For example, Revelation 22. 1 - 2 expresses a similar spirit to Jubilees 1.21, suggesting a sympathy between John's cosmology and that of the Qumran sect. The Qumran sect also anticipated the Christians by moving the sabbath from Saturday to Sunday.

### The Star of Bethlehem

'I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not now; a Star shall come forth out of Jacob; and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel'.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Numbers 24:17.

There is only one explicit reference to astrology in the New Testament - the Star of Bethlehem story in Matthew 2.1-2.

The Revised Standard Version reads

2.1. Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men came from the East to Jerusalem, saying,

2.2. Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship him'.

2.9 ...the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came to rest over the place where the child was'

The non-theological debate about the nature of the star follows three strands: was it a literary metaphor, a real astronomical event (e.g. comet or Jupiter-Saturn conjunction) or, following Molnar, an event with astrological/horoscopic significance? Recent books include

### **Recent books on the Star of Bethlehem**

Hughes, David *The Star of Bethlehem Mystery*, J.M. Dent and Sons, London, Toronto and Melbourne, 1979.

Kidger, Mark, *The Star of Bethlehem: An Astronomer's View*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1999.

Molnar, Michael R., *The Star of Bethlehem: The Legacy of the Magi*, by Michael R. Molnar, Rutgers University Press: New Jersey 1999.

Seymour, Percy. *The Birth of Christ: Exploding the Myth*, London: Virgin Publishing Ltd., 1998.

Also:

Molnar, Michael R., 'The Evidence for Aries the Ram as the Astrological Sign of Judea', in *Journal for the History of Astronomy*, August 2003, Vol. 34 part 3, pp. 325-7.

Also see Rob van Gent's bibliography at <http://www.phys.uu.nl/~vgent/stellamagorum/stellamagorum.htm>

### **Persian Influences**

See two articles, both by Gherardo Gnoli, in "The Encyclopedia of Religion" edited by Mircea Eliade (1987).

The article "Saoshyant" (Volume 13) has the statement: "The doctrine of the future saviour had already taken shape in the Achaemenid period (sixth to fourth centuries BCE). ... A similar concept, that of the future Buddha, Maitreya, was most likely indebted to it, and Christian messianism can trace its roots to the same source."

The article "Magi" (Volume 9) has the statement: "The Zoroastrian doctrine of the Saviour of the Future (Saoshyant) was the basis for the story of the coming of the Magi to Bethlehem in the Gospel of Matthew (2:1-12)."

An additional reference is: "I Magi a Betlemme e una predizione di Zoroastro" by Giuseppe Messina (Rome, 1933).

The Zoroastrian prophecy of a future saviour and also the story of the Journey of Tiridates can provide the basis for the Matthaean narrative of the "Star" and "Magi" which in all likelihood are narrative fictions comparable to haggadic midrash.

Gnoli, Gherardo, 'Magi' and Saoshyant', in Eliade, Mircea (ed.), *The Encyclopaedia of Religion*, New York and London: MacMillan 1987, Vols. 9, 13.

### **The following syndicated story summarised Michael Molnar's theory:**

<http://www5.cnn.com/2001/TECH/space/12/27/star.coverup/>  
 Was Christmas star a double eclipse of Jupiter?  
 December 27, 2001 Posted: 4:08 PM EST (2108 GMT)  
 By Richard Stenger, CNN Sci-Tech  
 Wise Men used a celestial sign to search for a divine king in Judea, according to Matthew's Gospel.

(CNN) -- A U.S. astronomer said he has uncovered the first reference to the star of Bethlehem outside the Bible, in the 4th-century writings of a Christian convert who wanted to hide the astrological roots of the celestial phenomenon. For centuries, scientists and scholars have debated about the nature of the Biblical light that led the Magi to the newborn Jesus. Some have suggested a comet or supernova. But Michael Molnar concluded that the star was actually a double eclipse of Jupiter roughly 2,000 years ago. The former Rutgers University researcher came up with the idea while studying a symbolic star map on an ancient Roman empire coin from Syria, which depicts Aries the ram and other celestial symbols. Molnar, deducing that Aries was the sign of the Jews, figured that ancient astrologers would have searched that constellation for a sign of a saviour of the kingdom of Judea. Computer modelling backed up his claim.

But Molnar lacked historical proof until now, he said. The *Mathesis*, a book written in 334 A.D. by Firmicus Maternus, an astrologer of Constantine the Great, described an astrological event involving an eclipse of Jupiter by the moon in Aries, and said that it signified the birth of a divine king. "Maternus did not mention Jesus' name," Molnar said. "But Roman astrology was a popular craze at the time and everyone reading the book would have known the reference was to Jesus and that the astrological event was the star of Bethlehem." He failed to bring up the name because he did not wish to offend the sensibilities of members of his new religion, who thought that the

Christian God, not the stars, governed the destiny of humankind. But old beliefs still held great sway in the Roman Empire. "Being a pagan who had converted to Christianity in his lifetime, Firmicus was torn. Hence his use of astrology to support the Christian story, but in a veiled way," Molnar said. The unconventional astronomer has gained the respect of notable Biblical historians. "I take Molnar's work quite seriously," said Owen Gingerich of Harvard University. "Anything he comes up with along these lines has to be considered as being very likely correct." Gushed Bradley Schaefer of Yale University, in a review Molnar's book, 'The Star of Bethlehem': "(It) has stunning new insight and approach, which finally gives a confident answer to a question that has fascinated all Christians through the ages."

### **Thoughts on Molnar's Christ horoscope posted on the HASTRO e mail list by Bernadette Brady**

Michael Molnar's hypothesis on the Star of Bethlehem, makes a great deal of sense with regards to the astrology of the day. For the occultation's of Jupiter by the Moon on the 17th April, 0006 bce produces a horoscope which both Hephaistio of Thebes and Ptolemy would have acknowledge as powerful. Hephaistio defines spear-bearers as planets that rise before the Sun, or can cast rays in front of the Sun (Apotelesmatics Book I trans Schmidt, Robert. Golden Hind Press Berkeley Springs, USA. 1994. 35) and Ptolemy (Tetrabiblos Trans Ashmand J.M. Health Research, California, USA. 1969.) talks of the doryphory as:

"Thus for example, the degree of their fortune and wealth will be indicated by the doryphory, or attendants of the luminaries. If the Luminaries be accompanied, (either in the same sign or in the signs next

following) by benefics, and by such stars or planets are as of the same tendency as themselves, a conspicuous and brilliant fortune is presaged.

" (114)

Also later in the Tetrabiblos Ptolemy considers a person's fame or rank. He reserves the top level, that of Kings, or Princes for a precise set of astrological rules which the 17th April 0006 bce horoscope very nearly fulfils. (174) Whereas the popular triple conjunctions of 29th

May, 0007 bce, 1st October, 0007 bce and lastly the 5th December, 0007 bce do not produce a horoscope which would satisfied these accepted astrological conditions of rank and fame.

In addition, on the morning of the 19th April, 0006 bce Venus was in her morning rising and almost at maximum magnitude of -3.92. So it would have been both a visually beautiful pre dawn and as well as an astrological configuration acknowledged by that era as quite significant.

**The Star of Bethlehem: The Legacy of the Magi , by Michael R. Molnar, Rutgers University Press, New Jersey, 208 pp, cloth, \$25, 1999.**

Reviewed by Nick Campion *Archaeoastronomy* 2000

The tale of the Star of Bethlehem remains perhaps the most famous example of an astrological, or for that matter astronomical, prediction in history. Yet, ever since Kepler began the speculation on the star's nature (was it a Jupiter-Saturn conjunction, a comet, a nova - or a miracle?) astronomers have completely failed to reach a definitive conclusion. The confusion extends from the excellent investigations by David Hughes (*The Star of Bethlehem Mystery* 1979) and Percy Seymour (*The Birth of Christ: Exploding the Myth* 1998) and numerous smaller articles and papers, to the Christian Bible commentaries themselves. For example, William Barclay (*The Daily Study Bible: Matthew*, 1975, p 28-31) doesn't think that the story is merely a 'lovely legend', but nevertheless concludes that the star's astronomically incomprehensible movement across the sky must be 'lovely poetry'. R.T. France (*Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Matthew*, 1985, p 82), avoids both physics and poetry, concluding that 'what Matthew describes is guidance by a miraculous occurrence'.

The problem of course, is that the words of Matthew 2.9 ('and behold the star which they saw in the east went before them, until having come it stood over [the place]where was the child' - revised standard version) are so vague that we usually have to resort to ingenious explanations or dismiss the whole episode as a literary device typical of heroic births in the classical world. Matthew was, after all, a Hellenised Jew (and Christian), presumably well versed in the conventions of Greek biography.

Michael Molnar's contribution to the debate presents us with what might well be the most appropriate solution to date. Molnar's background is neither in Biblical scholarship nor historical research (he was manager of the Physics Instructional Laboratories at Rutgers University), perhaps a good recipe for an original approach.. In a move so obvious it is astonishing that nobody thought of it before, Molnar argues that if the 'wise men' were astrologers (as they are called in three out of seven standard translations, we should look at what the astrologers of the Hellenistic world actually did. And what they didn't do was follow brilliant stars across the countryside of the near east. Instead they used ephemerides and cast horoscopes. They interpreted astronomical configurations in line with rules which allocated strength and significance to planets on the basis of a complex series of factors determined by zodiac sign, house (position in the diurnal cycle) and relationships with other planets. There was therefore no reason at all why the 'star' need have been a significant astronomical event to anyone apart from astrologers. Indeed, there was no reason why it should even have been visible, which explains why Herod could not 'see' it.

Molnar's quest began with the purchase of a first century AD coin minted in Antioch which depicted a ram turning its neck to look backwards at a star, followed by the realisation that in the second century Claudius Ptolemy attributed the rulership of Judaea to Aries, the sign of the ram. Molnar argues that this was a messianic icon, and was a reference, at least in part, to prophecies that the emperor Nero would recover his kingdom in the east. Thus, he argues, the messianic star in Matthew might also have had Arien associations. The task Molnar sets himself is, then, to establish what might

have constituted a messianic horoscope in the Hellenistic astrology of the time. He takes some of his evidence from such evidence as the monumental astrological relief constructed on the orders of Antiochus I of Commagene in the first century BC, and the birth chart of Hadrian. Most importantly though, he turns to the astrological texts themselves, relying heavily on Claudius Ptolemy's second century *Tetrabiblos*, Vettius Valens' *Anthology*, also second century, and Julius Firmicus Maternus' fourth century *Mathesis*. The latter is somewhat outside the time frame, but Molnar argues for a continuity of tradition and even identifies in Maternus' work a reference to what he identifies as the horoscope of Christ. It might be more correct to argue that Molnar's horoscope *signifies* the birth of Christ rather than indicating an exact day or hour of birth as one would expect in modern astrology. In the later astrology of the Islamic world it was conventional to cast horoscopes for the most recent significant astrological event prior to a notable birth, as Masha'Allah did for Mohammed, rather than for the hour of birth itself.

The key to Molnar's horoscope is his retranslation of Matthew 2.9 to 'and behold the star which was rising heliacally went retrograde and then stationed over the place where the child was born' (my words). Relying on the evidence of the coin (one of several examples), and textual references to great horoscopes from Valens, Ptolemy and Firmicus, Molnar argues that the 'star' was Jupiter and that 'the place' was Aries, that is Judaea. The date which comes closest to fulfilling the astrological criteria within the likely time frame for Christ's birth, 8-4 BC, was 17 April, 6 BC. On this day Jupiter became visible, rising as 'spear-bearer', along with Saturn, for the Sun, which itself was exalted in Aries. Jupiter itself was Aries' triplicity ruler and was occulted by the Moon, all of which Molnar argues were indications within Hellenistic astrology of the birth of a great ruler, conqueror or divine figure. In addition, the benefic planet Venus was strong in Pisces while the two malefic planets, Mars and Jupiter, were occupying helpful positions. Molnar identifies a second, less messianic, date on 19 December, which would have confirmed the magian view that 6 BC was auspicious for divine births.

The counter-argument to Molnar's thesis is exactly the same as for previous theories - that it assumes the essential historicity of a nativity story which many would argue is mythical. Yet his contribution to this ongoing mystery is perhaps the most significant since Kepler's, if only because he has significantly altered the terms of the debate. Even though there is little evidence of astrology in first century Judaism, except for various Dead Sea scroll fragments, it was an integral part of the Hellenistic culture which dominated Palestine: the region was host to around a hundred Greek cities, one of which was adjacent to Nazareth and would have provided employment for any poor carpenter from that town. Molnar has reminded us of what independent-minded Biblical critics have long understood - that the scriptures need to be understood in the context of Greek culture.

There is, as it happens, a short critique of Molnar's work already in print. In his *The Birth of Christ* (p 106-8) Percy Seymour, whose preferred date for Christ's birth is 15 September 7 BC, takes issue with the evidence presented by Molnar in his earlier paper in *The Quarterly Journal of the Royal Astronomical*

*Society* (June 1995). Seymour criticises Molnar's use of the Moon's occultation of Jupiter as a messianic significator on the grounds that it is too common, occurring every few years, sometimes more than once in a year. Fair enough, but the interpretation of horoscopes, Molnar's concern, depends not on the rarity of individual factors, but the entire picture built up by a succession of astrological indicators, some of which (such as house position), recur every day. Seymour also criticises Molnar's attribution of Judaea to Aries preferring Pisces. Yet, as Molnar points out the astrological connection between Jews and Pisces is found no earlier than the Renaissance, so it makes sense to take Ptolemy's opinion (Aries) as indicative of 1st century astrology.

In choosing to stake his claim in the fertile soil of horoscope astrology Molnar has opened up new territory. He makes an eloquent advocate for his case and he presents his arguments, including the sometimes convoluted rules of astrological judgement, with great clarity. It is a fortunate coincidence that his book's publication came in time for the millennium celebrations and it is to be hoped that Rutgers University Press make the most of this opportunity. Molnar may not have had the last word on the star of Bethlehem mystery, but he has certainly opened a new chapter.

Nick Campion

William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The Daily Study Bible, St. Andrew Press, Edinburgh, 1975.

R.T.France, *Matthew*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, Intervarsity Press, Leicester, 1985.

David Hughes, *The Star of Bethlehem Mystery*, J.M. Dent and Sons, London, Tornot and Melbourne, 1979.

Michael R. Molnar, 'The Magi's Star from the Perspective of Ancient Astrological Practices, Quarterly Journal of the Royal Astronomical Society, 1995, Vol. 36, pp. 109-126.

Percy Seymour. *The Birth of Christ: Exploding the Myth*, Virgin Publishing Ltd., London 1998.

See also

*The Sybilline Oracles*, Milton S. Perry, translator, 1899, from Internet Sacred Text Archive, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/sib/sib05.htm>

Molnar web site

<http://www.eclipse.net/~molnar/>

Interestingly, in some medieval versions of the nativity there are 12 magi.

<http://www.proaxis.com/~deardorj/birthy.htm>

See also "Blood on the Moon in Aquarius: the Assassination of Domitian" at: <http://explorers.whyte.com/blood.htm>

## Later Christian Views of the Star

While the Bethlehem star may be seen as an obvious astrological omen, anti-astrology Christians could argue the reverse. The theological debate about the star's nature was of great concern to early Christians in view of the apparent support it gave to astrology, if only because astrologers appeared loyal to Christ. Why, then, should astrology be declared wrong?

For example, St. Ignatius (c.35-c.107) who, as bishop of Antioch was one of the senior churchmen of his day, argued that the star brought an end to the old beliefs and practices. It was as if the light of God swept away a world of darkness. 'This was the reason, he wrote, why every form of magic began to be destroyed, every malignant spell to be broken, ignorance to be dethroned, and ancient empire to be overthrown'.<sup>4</sup> It was the star's very novelty - that it was both so much brighter than all the rest which in turn, formed a kind of heavenly choir around it - which itself pointed to the newness of the eternal life which was only available through Christ and not through any other kind of belief, including other versions of stellar salvation.

Augustine discussed the problem of the Star of Bethlehem and, like his colleague and contemporary the bishop of Constantinople, St. John Chrysostom (c. 347-407), asserted that it was a new star that shone *because* Christ was born and its purpose was to point the way for the Magi to find the Word of God.<sup>5</sup>

## Non Christian Messianism - Virgil's Fourth Eclogue

In his Fourth Eclogue Virgil (1st c BCE) talks about the Virgin arising anew. Early Christians saw this as a prophecy of Christ. Astrologers have read the Virgin as Virgo. However, there is no hint in the text of the primary reference. It might, for example, have been to Athene Parthenos, the maiden/virgin Athene, one of the greatest goddesses of the classical world, who was worshipped in the Parthenon in Athens.

In some traditions Hera gives birth to Ares parthogenetically because she was so furious at Zeus' infidelities.

An interesting article regarding a non-astrological origin for stars associated with (the birth of) saviours is "The Influence of the Saviour Sentiment upon Virgil" by Norman De Witt (Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association, Volume LIV, 1923, Pages 39-50). It focuses on Eclogues 4 and 9 written by Virgil circa 37 BCE.

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<sup>4</sup> Ignatius of Antioch, 'To the Ephesians' in Kleist, James A. (trans.), *The Epistles of St. Clement of Rome and St Ignatius of Antioch*, New York: Newman Press, London 1946, p. 67.

<sup>5</sup> Augustine, *Contra Faustum Manichaeum* 2.5 (PL 42:cols 212-13) cited in Tester, *History*, pp. 111-12.

The Eclogues are accessible at: <http://classics.mit.edu/Virgil/eclogue.html>

A modern translation of the \*Eclogues\* is by B. H. Fowler (Chapel Hill:1997 ) and a recent and comprehensive commentary on the Latin text is by R. Coleman (Cambridge: 1977). Virgilian cosmology in literary contexts is treated by S. M. Braund, "Virgil and the cosmos: religious and philosophical ideas" in C. Martindale (ed.), \*The Cambridge Companion to Virgil\* (Cambridge: 1997): 204-21.

Present interpretations (and even those that predate DW's) suggest that the \*puer\* ("boy") in the poem is to be identified with the son of Gaius Asinius Pollio, a contemporary of Vergil who had arranged a peace treaty between Octavian and Antony (40 BCE) that essentially spared Italy further devastation. Pollio was consul shortly thereafter and became the father of the \*puer\*, the birth of whom, V. posits, stands as an omen for the coming return to peace and prosperity. In this sense the whole framework probably reflects the kind of thing to be seen in the prophetic Sybilline Books.

### **Cosmological References in the New Testament**

Aside from the Star of Bethlehem, the New Testament contains no specific astrological content, either for or against, although there are a number of passages with obviously mystical-cosmological significance, for example, in Mark 8.18 - 21 Jesus berates his disciples:

"Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets of broken pieces did you take up?" They said unto him, "Twelve". "And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets of broken pieces did you take up?" And they said to him, "Seven". And he said to them, "Do you not yet understand?"

The answer to the riddle would seem to lie in the numbers seven and twelve, the key ritual numbers in Hebrew tradition, seven being the number of the days of the creation, twelve the number of tribes. In addition, any intelligent audience of the first century would have been deeply aware of the cosmological significance of these numbers, there being seven planets and twelve signs of the zodiac.

(Matthew 12.45 refers to seven evil spirits, who are more evil than the 'unclean spirit')

Augustine (City of God XV.20 (p. 633-4), argues that 11 = sin and 10 = the Law. Then he argues that: the line of descent from Adam through Cain = 11 = sin. The line ends with Lamech's daughter Namaah, whose name means 'pleasure', and pleasure = resistance to the spirit, i.e., sin.

The line of descent from Adam to Noah through Seth = 10, the number of the Law.

Add the three sons of Noah, deduct the one who fell into sin, but keep the two who received Noah's blessing, then 10 + 2 = 12.

12 = number of both Patriarchs and Apostles

12 is important because it is composed of the 'two parts of seven', i.e., 3 and 4:  $3 \times 4 = 12$ .

### **The Twelve Disciples**

Just as the twelve sons of Jacob found a parallel in the twelve sons of Ishmael so Jesus' disciples, his twelve executive deputies, were exactly mirrored in the twelve chief priests (Levites) who ministered to the twelve tribes in the Qumran sect, the writers of the Dead Sea Scrolls<sup>6</sup>. Authority in the Qumran sect, as in the earliest Christianity, lay with twelve lay elders who, according to the War Rule, were to play a vital role in the coming eschaton. These three groups of twelve fulfilled a function in essence exactly the same as that of Jesus' apostles, to prepare for the ending of the age. During the final battle between the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness, the twelve tribal elders were to discharge their duties 'on the festivals, new moons, Sabbaths or weekdays', so ensuring the community's survival.<sup>7</sup> We read that 'so long as these men exist in Israel, the deliberative council of the community (of Qumran) will rest securely on a basis of truth'.<sup>8</sup>

There also appears to have been a ritual connection between the number twelve and the numbers 7, 70 and 72, a relationship made explicit by Christ in his parable on the loaves and fishes (Mark 8. 17 - 21). We have noted how in Exodus the twelve leaders of the tribes were supplemented by seventy elders, while Jesus appointed seventy additional disciples to supplement the twelve. The twelve for their part required the entire body of disciples to select seven of their number to serve at table after the ascension (Acts 6.2). An interesting parallel occurs in Exodus in which the first oasis reached by the Israelites after the crossing of the Red Sea, was Elim. This settlement, we read, contained twelve springs and seventy palm trees (Exodus 15.27).

In the New Testament the power to perform 'signs and wonders' was delegated to the twelve disciples after Christ's ascension, but always directly on God's authority - 2 Corinthians 12.11 - 12.

### **Omens of the End**

Mark 13.

24 But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light,

25 and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

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6 War Rule II. See also Allegro, Dead Sea Scrolls . The writers of the Dead Sea Scrolls described a system in which overall authority was vested in three priests, probably imitating the priestly triumvirate around Moses, Aaron, Eleazar and Ithmar. The three elders are also mirrored in the equivalent function of John, Peter and James who were described by Paul as pillars of the Jewish-Christian church (Numbers 3.4, Galatians 2.9).

7 Manual of Discipline ii. 1 - 6.

8 Manual of Discipline viii. 1 - 19. See also The War of the Sons of Life and the Sons of Darkness ii. 1 - 6, The War Rule II.

26 And then they will see the Son of man, coming in clouds with great power and glory.

27 And then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

28 From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and put forth its leaves, you know that summer is near.

29 So also, when you know that he is near, at the very gates.

30 Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away before all these things take place.

31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

32 But of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

33. Take heed, watch, for you do not know when the time will come.

See the almost identical passages in Matthew 13.29-36 and Luke 21.25-33..

Luke 21

10 Then he said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom;

11 there will be great earthquakes and pestilences; and there will be terrors and great signs from heaven.

25 And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth distress of nations in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves

Repeats Matthew and Mark on the Son of man coming on a cloud - see also Mathew 27.64

Matthew 24.29-30.

Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken; then will appear the Son of man in heaven...coming on the clouds of heaven with power and glory'.

NB chapters 24-25 contain an extensive account of the Last Days.

Mark 13.24-25 repeats Matthew 24.29-30 almost word for word.

Acts 2.19-21:

And I will show wonders in the heaven above

And signs on the earth beneath,

Blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke;

The sun shall be turned into darkness\*

And the moon into blood,\*,

Before the day of the Lord comes,

the great and manifest day

And it shall be that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

\*Does this refer to the crucifixion (see below)

### **Morning Star**

Revelation 22:16 Jesus: 'I am the root and offspring of David, the bright morning star'.

(see Isaiah 14:12).

Revelation 2:28: John will give the faithful in the church of Thyatira (those who have remained faithful), the 'morning star' (= Jesus?).

### **Lightning**

Luke 10:18: I saw Satan fall like lightning from Heaven.

### **The Crucifixion.**

The Crucifixion took place at the Passover, celebrated on the first or second full moon or second following the spring equinox. i.e., the full moon of 14/15 Nisan, the first month. Descriptions of the crucifixion can be interpreted either metaphorically as literary indications of God's grief or anger, or literally as the occurrence of an eclipse:

Matthew 27:51: 'Now from the sixth hour there was darkness all over the land until the ninth hour'.

This is repeated almost word for word in Luke 23 44-45: 'It was now about the sixth hour and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun's light failed...'

The key to the dating is that the Passover took place on a Friday - Luke 24.56 tells us that the following day was the Sabbath, i.e., Saturday.

There would have been a lunar eclipse at 11<sup>0</sup> Libra in the tropical zodiac on 3 April 33 AD in the modern calendar (Full Moon at 17.37 LMT)  
(Colin J. Humphreys and W.G. Waddington of Oxford University, cited by Dietrick E. Thomsen in the January 21, 1984 issue of *Science News*.)

Rudolf Steiner calculated the horoscope for the crucifixion for April 3 33, in order to coincide with a lunar eclipse which would have been rising as the sun set.  
Vreede, Elisabeth, *Anthroposophy and Astrology*, Great Barrington MA: Anthroposophic Press 2001, pp. 204, 206-7.

The problem with a literal interpretation of the passage is that the full moon can only coincide with lunar eclipses, and they can only be visible at night. Yet Mathew 27.50 and Luke 24.46 record Christ's death as the darkness ended at the ninth hour, which can only be the ninth hour after dawn, hence around 3 pm.

### **The Crucifixion as a Literary Event**

It can be argued that the crucifixion story is an adaptation of Psalm 22

To the choirmaster: according to the *Hind of the Dawn*. A Psalm of David.

1. My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?

16...a company of evildoers encircle me; they have pierced my hands and feet...  
 18...they divide my garments among them, and for my raiment they cast lots.

There is a tradition in the Latin Church which places the Crucifixion in the year 29 (Geminis consulibus) either on March 25 (Tertulian and St. Augustine) or on March 23 (Lactantius). Those two dates are not scientific in the sense that March 23, 29 A.D. was not a Friday, and that both dates are far removed from Full Moon and therefore from Passover. That year seems also a bit early from a chronological point of view.

### **Medieval Commentary on the Crucifixion 'Eclipse'**

ECLIPSE DURING THE PASSION MIRACULOUS. --

From the aforesaid it is also evident that, when the sun was eclipsed during the Passion and the same Passion occurred at full moon, that eclipse was not natural -- nay, it was miraculous and contrary to nature, since a solar eclipse ought to occur at new moon or thereabouts. On which account Dionysius the Areopagite is reported to have said during the same Passion, "Either the God of nature suffers, or the mechanism of the universe is dissolved."

Thorndike, Lynn, *The Sphere of Sacrobosco and its Commentators*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1949, p. 142; see also p.117.  
<http://www.esotericarchives.com/solomon/sphere.htm> .

(It is significant that Sacrobosco uses the term *machina mundi* to describe the universe. It doesn't conform to the stereotype of thirteenth- century thought)

Jesus' body was then interred by Joseph of Arimathea in the evening (Matthew 27.57).

### **E mail from Rob van Gent 15 October 2003:**

It may be of interest to note that the "crucifixion eclipse" is one the three "unnatural" eclipses mentioned in the "Book of Sidrak and Bokkus", a Middle English verse adaptation of an Old French collection of questions-and-answers on a great variety of topics. This work, which is believed to date from the 13th century, enjoyed some popularity in the Middle Ages as it was also translated into Italian, Danish and Dutch.

In this book, king Bokkus (a descendant of Japhet who is stated to have lived some 850 years after the death of Noah), raises numerous questions on man, God, the earth and the universe which are all answered by the philosopher Sidrak. When discussing the nature of eclipses and how they are caused, Sidrak concludes with the observation:

Other eclips iij we fynde  
 Of the sonne ayenst kynde:  
 Ooon cam in tyme of Noe  
 Ayens that the dyluuy shold be;  
 Another shal be, sothe to say,

In tyme that Goddys Sone shall day;  
And in the birthe shall be the thridde  
Of Antecriste, as shal be kydde.

The "Book of Sidrak and Bokkus" contains numerous other questions-and-answers on astronomy, astrology and cosmogony that should interest members of this list, such as: "how far away are the stars and how many are there", "why is the Moon cold and the Sun hot", etc.

T.L. Burton, *Sidrak and Bokkus: A parallel-text edition from Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 559 and British Library, MS Lansdowne 793* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1998-1999 [Early English Text Society, O.S., 311-312]), 2 vols.

### **The Resurrection**

The resurrection was discovered 'toward dawn' (Matthew 28.1) or 'at early dawn' (Luke 24.1) of the first day of the week, i.e. Sunday. The resurrection had to be discovered on the third day to accommodate the prophecies (Matthew 27.62), and anyway, we have to assume that the women would have gone to the tomb as soon as possible - and they couldn't go on Saturday because it was a day of rest (Luke 23.56). But the gospel writer cannot have been unaware that any pagan reader would instantly be struck by the significance of the resurrection being discovered as the sun rose.

### **Pentecost**

The origin of the Christian church, as defined by the disciples' receipt of power from God (Acts 1.8), as described in Acts 2, occurred on Pentecost, the Greek name for the Jewish festival of weeks, always held fifty days after the Sabbath of Massot (the Sabbath immediately after Passover) and hence on a Sunday. In Acts 2:13, the ecstatic apostles are accused of being drunk. Peter begins his response (verse 15) by stating that it is only the third hour. The civil Hebrew hour (one twelfth of the astronomical day) was almost exactly one hour at that date and place. Therefore, it was between 7:57 and 8:57 am LMT, Jerusalem (although many translations casually say 9:00 am).

### **Time**

Greek versions of the Bible, upon which our modern scriptures are based, use several words to denote time, chiefly *chronos* and *kairos*. Times are also spoken of both quantitatively and qualitatively: an example of the former is the claim that Christ spent forty days in the desert, of the later his announcement that 'the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand', or "'Father, the hour has come'" (Mark 1.15; John 17.1; I Timothy 2.6 adds that Christ was sacrificed at 'the proper time'.)

It has been argued that time as quantity is consistently denoted by the word *chronos*, and as quality by *kairos*. However, this distinction collapses once it becomes clear that in many important instances time as quantity itself possessed quality, and that figures such as seven, twelve and forty were intended to represent a truth about the nature of creation which went far beyond mere measurements. The historical sections of the Bible are so packed with numbers describing every possible situation that it is easy to

imagine that they are all genuine measurements. Many are no more than the application of the literary convention that the truth of an event might be demonstrated if its time and duration were specified. Yet amid the mass of unconnected and meaningless figures which colour almost every story in the Old Testament run several important threads. The key to scriptural chronology was that if significant events occurred at appropriate moments, then the time which separated them must also be significant, and hence must be recorded.

Vardaman, Jerry; Yamauchi, Edwin N., *Chronos, Kairos, Christos: Nativity and Chronological Studies Presented to Jack Finegan*, Winona lake, 1989.

### **Revelation**

The only overtly cosmological text in the New Testament, though, is the Revelation of St. John, an imaginative work of grand proportions. Its repetition of the number seven - churches in Asia, spirits before the throne of God, the famous seals and, significantly, stars, ties Christian cosmology to the planets.<sup>9</sup> The woman with a crown of twelve stars and the tree with twelve kinds of fruit, one for each month for the 'healing of the nations' brings in the zodiac.<sup>10</sup>

Then he showed me the river of the water of life bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the city; also on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations  
Revelation 22, 1-2.

Meanwhile the omens of the end of the world include eclipses - a blackened sun and blood red moon - as well as stars falling to the earth - implicitly reinforcing the use of Babylonian style astrology of celestial signs.<sup>11</sup> Revelation's role in reinforcing Old Testament predictions of celestial signs of the apocalypse was to mean that all Christian condemnations of astrology have had to be directed against the deterministic version which emanated partly from Platonism but especially from the Stoics, and has to make allowances for an astrology of divine warnings.

### **New Testament passages used as arguments against astrology**

Matthew. 5.34. 'Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King'.

On the impossibility of predicting of the Second Coming:

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<sup>9</sup> For seven stars see Revelation 1.17 and 3.1

<sup>10</sup> Revelation 12.1, 22.2.

<sup>11</sup> Revelation 6.12-13, 8.10.

Matthew 24.36: 'But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the father only'.

See also 24.44, 25.13,

Mark 13.32. repeats the statement 'of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father' but contains the command 'The heed, watch' (13.33), 'I say to you all: Watch' (13.37).

See also Luke 22.36: 'watch at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of man'.

And

Acts 1.6: 'So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority'.

Therefore the Second Coming and Last Days will be announced on the heavens but the heavenly signs cannot be predicted in advance. Hence, philosophically, this is astrology of a Babylonian variety.

Heavenly phenomena can also indicate the presence of evil - even if in this case, the triumph of good over evil:

Luke 10.17 'And he (Jesus) said to them, 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven'.

After the End 'Heaven and earth will pass away' (Mathew 24.34, repeated exactly in Luke 21.33)

Even though it was clearly stated that these events would take place within the life time of Jesus' audience (Matthew 24.34, Luke 21.36) their failure to do so was easily attributed to change of plan by God - after all, he was the only one who knew when the End was to occur.

### **Disapproval of the planets**

The prophets had regarded the planets' apparently erratic movements as evidence of disorder within God's ordered cosmos. We find this idea in the letter of Jude, verse 13. Comparing them to 'men in their dreamings (who) defile the flesh', 'walk in the way of Cain' and 'abandon themselves for the sake of gain to Balaam's error', and 'wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame', they are:

'wandering stars for whom the nether gloom of darkness has been reserved for ever'.

NB Lucifer, a Christian synonym for Satan, is the Latin translation of Phosphoros, 'light bringer', the Greek name for Venus.

## Opposition to Astrology by the Church Fathers

(see <http://catholic.com/library/astrology>)

St. Ignatius (c.35-c.107), bishop of Antioch.

St. Clement of Rome (c. 96), bishop of Rome

Justin Martyr c 100-165

Tatian the Syrian, b. c. 120.

St. Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-c.215), bishop of Alexandria  
(\*sympathetic to Gnosis).

Tertullian (c. 160-c.225)

St. Hippolytus (c.170-c.236).

Origen (c.185-254), succeeded Clement as head of the Catechetical School in Alexandria.

Lactantius (c.240-c.320).

St. Athanasius (c.296-373), bishop of Alexandria.

St. Augustine

St. John Chrysostom (c. 347-407), bishop of Constantinople.

St. Basil the Great (c.330-379), bishop of Caesarea  
(\*leading anti-Arian)

On line source: <http://catholic.com/library/astrology>)

### Justin Martyr c 100-165

Pagan thinker. Converted c. 130. Taught for a time at Ephesus, later opened a school at Rome. Beheaded with his disciples c.165.

'First Apology' (c.155) was addressed to the emperor Antoninus Pius. Seeks to reconcile faith and reason, defends Christianity as the only rational faith.

'Second Apology' addressed to the Roman Senate, rebuts charges against Christians.

"Why, I beseech you, fill up life with idolatrous images, by feigning the winds, or the air, or fire, or earth, or stones, or stocks, or steel, or this universe, to be gods; and, prating loftily of the heavenly bodies in this much vaunted science of astrology, not astronomy, to those men who have truly wandered, talk of the wandering stars as gods? It is the Lord of the spirits, the Lord of the fire, the Maker of the universe, Him who lighted up the sun, that I long for."

(Second Apology Ch. VI., Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. I, p. 19 Ecf1)

'Dialogue with Trypho the Jew', develops identity of Logos with the God of the OT and the vocation of the Gentiles to take the place of Israel.

### Tatian the Syrian c. 120-c.172

Tatian was born in Syria around 120 and became a Christian in Rome in around 150-165. About 172 he returned to the east and founded the Encratites, a group who took their ascetic practices to such extremes that they were considered possibly heretical. His *Oratio ad Graecos* - Address to the Greeks - which was a passionate defence of the antiquity and purity of Christianity combined with a violent attack on Greek civilisation.

"[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 (c. 160-c.225)**

Tertullian was brought up in Carthage as a pagan and practised as a lawyer. He joined the Montanists, an apocalyptic movement which forecast an imminent outpouring of the Holy Spirit and was then instrumental in developing a particularly ascetic strain which disallowed second marriages, condemned the rules on fasting as too lax and forbade flight from persecution.

The following passage indicates that astrologers were responding to Christian attacks. The unnamed astrologer has obviously objected to charges of idolatry. Tertullian responds that, even if astrologers do not worship idols, that does not save them from following a practice taught by demons in order to lead humanity away from God.

"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).

Clement of Alexandria's major attack on astrology was penned as a discussion between Clement and his father which took place in the crowd waiting to be admitted to a meeting with St. Peter,<sup>12</sup> in the manner of classical dialogues. Clement's account indicates the kind of familiarity with the subject that suggests that he had made at least some study of it.

Perhaps because it is well-informed though, Clement's critique does not fall into the simple astrology-is-demonic formula. It would be unlikely to for Clement was a Christian Platonist, enamoured of classical pagan culture, who favoured an allegorical rather than literal reading of Scripture. The major problem, he claims, is not that astrologers are lined up with the forces of evil, but that they are ignorant. There is, very usefully for our attempt to understand the mindset of the first and second centuries, also some discussion of the possible mechanics of astrology - not that Clement is doing any more than reporting it. It seems that there may have been a sort of moral Aristotelianism

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<sup>12</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *The Recognition*, Book X, in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (ed.), in *The Ante-Nicene Christian Library*, Edinburgh: Y and T Clark, 1847).

in which the stars were passive agents. When 'malignant power' was transferred into them, though, they became the agent through which man's lust was excited, the result being sin. According to this model sin was only 'provoked', not compelled or produced by such celestially inspired lust, a formula which survives in an aphorism familiar from medieval and modern astrology 'the stars do not compel'. Whereas this model - that the stars influence us, but it is up to us how we respond - has been a staple of western astrology since the thirteenth-century - for Clement it was the fatal flaw in a system which to all intents and purposes was deterministic. Whatever astrologers say, they couch both their explanations of past events and predictions of future ones in terms which suggests certainty. Yet the human freedom to choose whether to sin or not to sin meant that no event could be predicted before it happened and hence that no retrospective explanation could be taken seriously either. To test this Clement proposed a simple controlled test. First he tells his father, go to an astrologer and tell them that you suffered at a particular period. This, Clement said, they would explain according to the movements of the malefic planets, Mars and Saturn. Next, go to another astrologer, tell them that you experienced good fortune at the same period and wait for them to tell you that the benefic planets Venus and Jupiter were responsible. There's therefore no real validity in astrology, Clement reasoned, and astrologers only check their horoscopes to find a good fit for any event with the planets after the event. Worse, there's an inconsistency between the rules of astrology and the stars' influence. For example, Venus and Jupiter are benefic planets yet can tempt us into adultery, a sin. Where is the benevolent result, then, if we end up burning in hell? Christian cosmology thus clashed inevitably with astrology's essential amorality.

The real problem with all predictive system though, is that the future is completely and profoundly unknowable. When Clement and his father are admitted, with the rest of the crowd, to the public meeting, Clement actually talks to Peter. Peter's response is to quote XXXXXXXX - not even Jesus knew the signs of the end: only God, knows all things. Clement argued that Jesus had revealed everything that he considered sufficient for human knowledge and anything else was either irrelevant or would be revealed as and when necessary. Taken at face value this is actually a shocking argument in favour of ignorance, yet Clement was himself a great scholar. Attitudes to knowledge in general and opposition to astrology in particular can be read as symptomatic of Christianity's complex relationship with classical philosophy and religion. Some features of classical culture were deemed incompatible with Christianity, while others, which might be closely related, could be considered acceptable, or even positively supportive of the Christian world view. Technical astrology in the form of the calculation and interpretation of horoscopes was condemned for its determinism but the living Platonic cosmos was widely accepted. Clement, for example, interpreted Plato's myth of Er as suggesting that the soul descends through the twelve signs of the zodiac before birth and then returns through them after death.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Scott, Alan, *Origen and the Life of the Stars: a history of an idea*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1994, p. 107.

### Hippolytus

Hippolytus was a presbyter at Rome, apparently of some importance. He was exiled to Sardinia in the persecution of the emperor of Maximinus.

"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

(c.240-c.320).

converted to Christianity in around 300 and was promptly deprived of his job as teacher of rhetoric at Nicomedia. However, he recovered his position later, becoming tutor to Crispus, son of the emperor Constantine. His *Divine Institutions* was addressed to educated Romans and for the first time set out in Latin, rather than Greek, a systematic account of the Christian attitude to life.

"[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

The Council of Laodicea took place sometime between 345 and 365 and embedded sixty fourth-century canons in ecclesiastical law.

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

### Athanasius

In the following passage Athanasius is clearly referring to astrologers who have become Christians and have renamed the stars after saints.

"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

St. Basil the Great (c.330-379), a Cappadocian hermit who was brought out of isolation to become bishop of Caesarea and lead the fight back against the Arian heresy, also found himself discussing the subtleties of astrology rather than condemning the entire field outright.<sup>14</sup> For example, he accepted the natural astrology derived from Hesiod and Aratus. If the sky is clear a few days after the new moon then good weather can be expected, but if the moon's horns are thick and red (as they would be if the air is hazy), then a storm is on the way. Basil acknowledged the pragmatic use of such astrology to farmers, as well as to sailors for whom it could be a matter of life and death. Astrology might also be divinely sanctioned in that 'the Lord has already foretold that the signs of the dissolution of the universe will appear in the sun, moon and stars': no good Christian could do any other than watch the sky for signs of the End. However, that the general condition of the world is indicated by divine omens or the pressure of the moon on the atmosphere does not suggest that individual destiny is revealed in the horoscope. This, Basil insists, is a ridiculous proposition, mainly on the grounds that the certainty and precision claimed by the astrologers is contradicted by many examples as well as being inherently implausible.

"[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

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<sup>14</sup> Basil, Saint, *Exegetic Homilies*, trans. Agnes Clare, Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, DATE, Homily 6.

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).

### **Compromise with Sol Invictus and Platonism - Clement and Origen**

However, even though the theologians might protest, the boundaries between astrology and the prevailing culture were fluid. At the head of the church there was an attempt to appropriate and disguise popular veneration for the sun by celebrating Christ's birth on 25 December, the solstice and festival of the birth of Sol Invictus, the 'sun of righteousness'. We don't know when this happened but it was the practice in Rome by 336, twenty-four years after Constantine legalised Christianity. That the emperor had already, in 321, ordered that Sunday, which everyone knew was sacred to the sun, should be a public holiday, suggests that the location of Christmas at the solstice had imperial approval. Rather than trying to suppress solar worship, Constantine may have been deliberately attempting to identify it with Christianity and so win approval for his emerging state church. Astrologers themselves saw which way the wind was blowing and set out to accommodate the new order. In 367 the bishop of Alexandria, Athanasius, after whom the creed is named, complained that astrologers were giving the stars saints names.<sup>15</sup> A quarter of a century later, John Chrysostom, bishop of Constantinople, denounced Catholics who rejected the resurrection, 'adhere to superstitious observances...omens and auguries', and 'fortify themselves with the horoscope'.<sup>16</sup>

Clement of Alexandria's major attack on astrology was penned as a discussion between Clement and his father which took place in the crowd waiting to be admitted to a meeting with St. Peter,<sup>17</sup> in the manner of classical dialogues. Clement's account indicates the kind of familiarity with the subject that suggests that he had made at least some study of it.

Perhaps because it is well-informed though, Clement's critique does not fall into the simple astrology-is-demonic formula. It would be unlikely to for Clement was a Christian Platonist, enamoured of classical pagan culture, who favoured an allegorical rather than literal reading of Scripture. The major problem, he claims, is not that astrologers are lined up with the forces of evil, but that they are ignorant. There is, very usefully for our attempt to understand the mindset of the first and second centuries, also some discussion of the possible mechanics of astrology - not that Clement is doing any more than reporting it. It seems that there may have been a sort of moral Aristotelianism in which the stars were passive agents. When 'malignant power' was transferred into them, though, they became the agent through which man's lust was excited, the result being sin. According to this model sin was only

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<sup>15</sup> Athanasius, *Easter Letter*, 39: 1, [www.catholic.com/library/astrology](http://www.catholic.com/library/astrology)

<sup>16</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homilies on First Corinthians* 4: 11, , [www.catholic.com/library/astrology](http://www.catholic.com/library/astrology)

<sup>17</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *The Recognition*, Book X, in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (ed.), in *The Ante-Nicene Christian Library*, Edinburgh: Y and T Clark, 1847).

'provoked', not compelled or produced by such celestially inspired lust, a formula which survives in an aphorism familiar from medieval and modern astrology 'the stars do not compel'. Whereas this model - that the stars influence us, but it is up to us how we respond - has been a staple of western astrology since the thirteenth-century - for Clement it was the fatal flaw in a system which to all intents and purposes was deterministic. Whatever astrologers say, they couch both their explanations of past events and predictions of future ones in terms which suggests certainty. Yet the human freedom to choose whether to sin or not to sin meant that no event could be predicted before it happened and hence that no retrospective explanation could be taken seriously either. To test this Clement proposed a simple controlled test. First he tells his father, go to an astrologer and tell them that you suffered at a particular period. This, Clement said, they would explain according to the movements of the malefic planets, Mars and Saturn. Next, go to another astrologer, tell them that you experienced good fortune at the same period and wait for them to tell you that the benefic planets Venus and Jupiter were responsible. There's therefore no real validity in astrology, Clement reasoned, and astrologers only check their horoscopes to find a good fit for any event with the planets after the event. Worse, there's an inconsistency between the rules of astrology and the stars' influence. For example, Venus and Jupiter are benefic planets yet can tempt us into adultery, a sin. Where is the benevolent result, then, if we end up burning in hell? Christian cosmology thus clashed inevitably with astrology's essential amorality.

The real problem with all predictive system though, is that the future is completely and profoundly unknowable. When Clement and his father are admitted, with the rest of the crowd, to the public meeting, Clement actually talks to Peter. Peter's response is to quote XXXXXXXX - not even Jesus knew the signs of the end: only God, knows all things. Clement argued that Jesus had revealed everything that he considered sufficient for human knowledge and anything else was either irrelevant or would be revealed as and when necessary. Taken at face value this is actually a shocking argument in favour of ignorance, yet Clement was himself a great scholar. Attitudes to knowledge in general and opposition to astrology in particular can be read as symptomatic of Christianity's complex relationship with classical philosophy and religion. Some features of classical culture were deemed incompatible with Christianity, while others, which might be closely related, could be considered acceptable, or even positively supportive of the Christian world view. Technical astrology in the form of the calculation and interpretation of horoscopes was condemned for its determinism but the living Platonic cosmos was widely accepted. Clement, for example, interpreted Plato's myth of Er as suggesting that the soul descends through the twelve signs of the zodiac before birth and then returns through them after death.<sup>18</sup>

### **Clement of Alexandria c.150-.c.215)**

Head of the catechetical school at Alexandria from 190.

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<sup>18</sup> Scott, Alan, *Origen and the Life of the Stars: a history of an idea*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1994, p. 107.

Very influenced by Greek philosophy which he regarded as a preparation for the gospel

Like the Gnostics believed that knowledge or illumination was the chief element in Christian perfection, though true gnosis presupposed the faith of the church.

Like the desert hermits believed God was essentially unknowable.

Clement of Alexandria, *Works*, 2 Vols., trans. G.W.Butterworth, Cambridge Mass, London, Harvard University Press 1919.

Chap 2 p. 53, attacks sun and star worship of Indians and Phrygians

YET

Chap 2, p. 51, 'there was of old implanted in man a certain fellowship with the heavens'

Chap 4, p. 143: The stars are instruments for measuring time (Genesis 1.14) and should not be worshipped because they are the works of God.

Chap 6, p. 153. Attacks astrology because 'I seek for God himself, not for the works of God'. Jokes that astrologers, not planets, are the wanderers (planet = Greek 'wanderer')

Chap 6, .p 163, Speaks approvingly of Pythagoras, who said God is within the universe, not outside it.

Chap 6, p. 159, speaks approvingly of Plato, who learnt geometry from the Egyptians and astronomy from the Babylonians.

Chap 6, p. 159. It is God, the measure of the truth of all existence'. Quotes Plato Laws 715e-716a: 'Now God, holding the beginning and end and middle of all existence, keeps an unswerving path, revolving according to nature'.

That there was an overlap between the old cosmology and the new religion was also evident amongst senior theologians, of whom one of the most notable was Origen (c.185-254), successor to Clement of Alexandria as head of the Catechetical School in that city. This institution was aimed at the propagation of Christianity amongst the educated classes and was one of the key centres for the overlap with Neoplatonism. He was a man of independent thought who crossed Demetrius, his bishop, when he went to preach in Palestine even though he was a layman. He was recalled to Alexandria though invited back to Palestine by the bishops there, thought his time they ordained him as a priest. A furious Demetrius, though, sacked Origen from both the school and the priesthood and sent him into exile. Origen promptly settled at Caesarea, the Palestinian capital and a noted centre of learning. There he preached Christianity within a Neoplatonic cosmology.

Origen had no more patience with judicial astrology, which he regarded as 'godless and unholy' than did Clement or Basil.<sup>19</sup> Neither, like Basil,<sup>20</sup> did he have any patience with those who pointed to Genesis 1.14 - 'Let the lights be for signs' - as a justification for astrology as a whole. Origen's opposition to astrology, like Clement's and Basil's, falls directly in the sceptical tradition

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19 Origen, *The Philocalia of Origen*, trans. George Lewis, Edinburgh I and T Clark, 1911, p. 174

20 Basil, Homily 6.8.

arising out of the second-century BCE Platonism of the New Academy, developed by Carneades, supported by Cicero and continued by Plotinus in his own attack on the astrologers. Yet, like Cicero and Plotinus, Origen accepted without question the theory of the intelligent, living universe, inhabited by divine stars and planets, which provided the philosophical rationale for the astrology practiced by such eminent figures as Thrasyllus. In a sense this is hardly surprising. After all, in Christian moral cosmology heaven was in the sky, the area between heaven and earth might be populated by angels, and hell was below, or in the centre of the earth. The visible, material world was populated by good and evil spirits which were constantly vying for human attention. The marriage between Christianity and Platonism, with its own theory of an invisible, perfect world, was therefore a perfectly natural one. Platonic doctrines of the ordered, harmonious, mathematically regulated universe provided the church Fathers with a cosmology which demonstrated that God's creation was, above all good.<sup>21</sup>

Like Cicero, Origen also discussed the doctrine of the ascent of the soul through the planetary spheres. This, again, should be seen as perfectly natural. If the standard cosmology of the times held that the planets moved through spheres situated between heaven and earth then it followed that righteous souls had to travel through them if they were to reach heaven. The stellar journey was thus an integral part of the path to salvation. In each planetary sphere the soul attains a certain level of mind and understanding. Once the appropriate level has been reached then the soul passes on to the next sphere and so on until it reaches its final abode - heaven.<sup>22</sup> This was an idea pulled directly from the Platonic tradition and held in common with the Hermetic teachings and Mithraism. Neither was it considered heretical. Rather, thanks to Cicero and Macrobius, it became a given of medieval Christian cosmology.

The gulf between the Christians and the Platonists could be marked by bitter rhetoric. The second century philosopher Celsus launched an attack on the Christians (and the Jews) which included his scorn for their refusal to worship the stars. Origen replied in his great work, *Contra Celsum*. However, even the planet worshipping Platonists acknowledged that their stellar religion had limitations placed on it by the fact that both Plato and Aristotle acknowledged the presence of the superior creator God. The astral deities could no longer themselves be creators as they were in Babylon, but only lesser beings in a great system.

### **Origen 185/6-253**

Alexandrian Christian Neoplatonist (same teacher as Plotinus)

Acc to Jerome, greatest Christian teacher after the apostles.

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<sup>21</sup> Scott, Alan, *Origen and the Life of the Stars: a history of an idea*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1994, pp. 130-1.

<sup>22</sup> Scott, Alan, *Origen and the Life of the Stars: a history of an idea*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1994, pp. 160-1.

- **Origen, *Works*, ed G.W.Butterworth, London 1936.**????????????????????????????????????????
- Origen, *Contra Celsum*, Books 2 - 8, trans. Frederick Crombie, Edinburgh, 1869.

The sun also, and the moon and the rest of the heavenly bodies are living beings, and moreover, just as we men for certain sins have been enveloped in these bodies of ours, which are gross and heavy, so the lights of heaven have been given bodies of one sort or another to enable them to provide more or less light, while the daemons, for greater offences, have been clothed with aerial bodies. And that the soul of the sun is older than the covering which serves for a body can, I think, be logically shown from a comparison of the sun with man, and after that from the scriptures. (**Works**, Book 1 chap 7).

**Works** I.7 The sun is not impressed by the stars because he is not impressed with physical things in general, but is impressed by the regularity of the plan and the majestic order' of the planets.

III.5 The purpose of the sun, moon and stars is to 'fulfil an obedient service for the world'.

II.11.6-7. The saints ascend to heaven via the planetary spheres and understand each one as they pass through it.

Note p 225. It was believed that Origen supported astrology and was attacked for it. Plotinus quotes this but says it is unjustified.

III.3.2. 'As for the rulers of this world, we understand this to be what they call the secret and hidden philosophy of the Egyptians and astrology of the Chaldeans and Indians, who profess a knowledge of high things, and further the manifold and diverse opinion of the Greeks concerning the divine nature'

**Contra Celsum** V.11 'the sun, moon and stars pray to God who is over all through his Only-begotten.

Origen, '**Commentaries on Genesis**', in Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel*, trans. Edwin Hamilton Gifford, 2 Parts, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House 2002 [1981], pp. 280-295.

'God's foreknowledge does not in any way necessitate the foreknown events' (Book VI, chap XI, p. 290d)

'none of the things which concern mankind are caused by the stars, but as we have said before are only indicated, if so it be; which is the same as if one learned both past and present events not from the stars, but from the mind of God, by some prophetic utterance'.  
Book VI, chap XI, p. 292a.

But then quotes the mockery of the Babylonian astrologers from Isaiah 47.13-14 and concludes that 'those who are entirely devoted to the study of these

matters are unable to foreshow what the Lord has purposed to bring upon each nation'. events' (Book VI, chap XI, p. 295 c-d.

### **Uses Old Testament passages:**

Genesis 1.16 God made the sun to rule the day and the moon to rule the night  
 Jeremiah 44.17-19, 25. The moon is the Queen of heaven (a reference to moon worship!) BUT

Job 25.5 25.5, the stars are not clean in his sight.

Psalms 103.18 'I have given precepts to the stars'

Isaiah 45.12 'I made the earth, and created man upon it; it was my hands that stretched out the heavens, and I commanded all their host (see also 45.18)

### **The Cosmic State**

In the new Christian order Jesus exerts executive authority on God's behalf:

Matthew 28.18. See also Ephesians 1.20 - 21: 'he (God) made him (Christ) sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion..., not only in this age but also in that which is to come'

### **The Christian Calendar**

As Jesus was crucified on the Passover it follows that **Easter**, the commemoration of his death and resurrection, must coincide roughly in time with Passover, a fact which was to be a considerable problem for the Church, anxious as it was to distinguish itself from its Jewish roots. The date of Easter is determined by the Paschal Full Moon, i.e., the first Full Moon following the Spring Equinox, in the tropical sign of Aries, or 14 Nisan in the Jewish calendar. This was Passover.

The Roman church solved this problem by holding Easter at the weekend following the Full Moon. Easter Sunday, celebrating the resurrection, is the Sunday following the first Full Moon following the spring equinox.

The custom of observing Easter on 14 Nisan, is known as Quartodecimanism and was established in Asia Minor: when St. Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, visited Rome c.155, Pope Anicetus celebrated Easter on the Sunday following 14 Nisan, but had no problem with Polycarp celebrating it on 14 Nisan. Pope Victor I (189-98) tried to suppress the practice and the Quartodecimans later organised themselves into a separate Church, surviving until the fifth century.

Easter is still celebrated on different dates in the western and eastern churches.

**Christmas Day** was celebrated on 25th December in Rome by 336 CE - as recorded in the Philocalian Calendar or Liberian Catalogue, a list of Popes down to Liberius (352-66). 25 December was the feast of Natalis Solis Invicti, and chosen by Christians deliberately, perhaps to make their 'Sun of Righteousness' compete with Sol Invictus, perhaps to make Christianity more appealing to pagans by blurring the differences. The Roman celebration gradually spread through the western church but in the east Epiphany = Greek 'manifestation'), the date of Jesus' baptism became the more important

festival. This festival originated in the 3rd c CE and spread to the west by the 4th c, where it became associated with the manifestation of Christ to the gentiles in the form of the Magi. The fact that Epiphany is twelve days after Christmas points to a now-lost cosmological significance (does twelve days = twelve months, i.e., one complete cosmic cycle?).

### **Jesus' Divinity, Hermeticism and Gnosticism**

One of the great problems in Christianity concerns the nature of Christ - was he all human, mainly human, mainly divine or completely divine? In the first few centuries CE the idea that he was human was represented strongly in the Antiochene Theology, based in Antioch among Christians who held strongly to Christianity's Jewish roots. They held strongly to the oneness of God (minimising the separate identities of the Trinity) and, while conceding Christ's divinity, emphasised his humanity. They also regarded the scriptures as essentially historical and literal. Their teachings were discredited by the Council of Ephesus in 431.

However, the Alexandrian Theology, based in Alexandria, emphasised God's transcendence and Christ's divinity Apollinaris, c. 310-c.390, bishop of Laodicea, c even denied Christ's humanity altogether) and favoured mystical and allegorical interpretations of scripture. That such views were put forward in Alexandria strongly suggests that their Christianity was being shaped by the same philosophies which produced Hermeticism.

Another, different teaching which emerged from Alexandria has strong overtones of Gnosticism. This was Arianism, founded by Arius, c.250-336, an Alexandrian priest. He maintained that Christ the Son was not eternal but was created by God the Father from nothing as an instrument for the creation of the world. He was not divine by nature but was changeable and essentially human, declared the Son of God by God only on account of his righteousness, not his divine nature. Though condemned at Alexandria in 320 Arianism proved very popular. Constantine called the Council of Nicaea in 325 which, under the leadership of Athanasius, defined the 'coeternity and coequality' of Father and Son. However Constantius (Eastern Roman Emperor 337-361) was a supporter and Arianism became extremely influential. After Constantius' death Arianism was condemned by the Council of Constantinople in 361. It was adopted by the Germanic tribes such as the Ostrogoths and Vandals, but there was pressure on the Germans to convert to the Roman (i.e. Catholic) church for political reasons. The Franks conversion to Catholicism in 496 resulted in Arianism's disappearance.

### **European Millenarianism**

The simple astrology of the Old Testament prophets relied exclusively on unexpected events in the sky as warnings that God's divine order was about to break down, even if on his own command. The alternative system which was developed in Mesopotamia in the first and second millennia BCE and which appeared in Greece by the fourth century BCE, saw political or global collapse as integral to the divine order as expressed through planetary cycles. In the first centuries CE the Sassanian Persians noticed that the total

sequence of possible Jupiter-Saturn conjunctions took 960 years, just forty years short of the significant thousand year period (Pingree 1997). After this work entered medieval Europe in 1140 when Herman of Carinthia translated Abu Ma'shar's ninth-century work, the *Maius Introductorum*, there were two principle astrological means of predicting the coming of the millennium. On the one hand, there were signs and wonders, the disorderly events of the Old Testament such as comets and, on the other, the predictable, orderly sequence of planetary conjunctions which could be predicted hundreds of years in advance. Combining Jewish and Greek cosmologies, and demonstrating their application to eschatology, Nicole Oresme (c.1320-1382), bishop of Lisieux, wrote,

Again, this lower world is governed by the heavenly bodies and their movement, as Aristotle says, for they are the instruments of God, by means of which he governs nature, and which incline the hearts of men to various fortunes, without violence or necessity, and to know these bodies and these movements, astrology has been especially ordained, that great science which would be, as it were useless, unless by its aid we could know the things of the future. And of these the sun, moon and stars, are signs as our Lord said when he made them, according to the exposition of St. Augustine on Genesis (Coopland 1952: 67)

Coopland, G.W., *Nicole Oresme and the Astrologers: a study of his De Divinacions*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press 1952.

Notable examples of predictable planetary patterns occurred in 1484, when it was predicted that the Jupiter-Saturn conjunction in Scorpio would bring the demise of Christianity, and the conjunction of 1523, the turbulent early years of the Reformation, in Pisces which, it was widely thought, would coincide with a repetition of the great flood.

### **Christianity v Paganism**

'They (Christian priests) are there to produce magic, to go through the rituals which are needed to keep the community in a state of grace and harmony with the universe...The old gods and goddesses are swept away and the trinity and the saints are put in their place...As far as we can tell people's relationship with religion didn't change a jot between paganism and Christianity.

Ronald Hutton, referring to the conversion of Britain in 'Do You Believe in Magic?', Channel 4, 29 March 2003.

### **Summary by Lester Ness**

Early Christianity was, in a sense, a counter-cultural movement. Early Christians rejected many aspects of contemporary culture, including belief in astrology. Christianity grew out of earlier Judaism and the Fathers of the Church split the heritage of the Second Temple Era with the Rabbis, it is true. The differences grew larger as each movement developed. The Rabbis rejected the Greek intellectual tradition and the Greek Old Testament. The Fathers kept Greek language, the Greek Old Testament (including some books the Rabbis rejected, now called the Apocrypha), most of the Hellenistic

Jewish literature, most of the Pseudepigrapha. The Pseudepigrapha is a group of books resembling the Biblical books, but not part of the Bible. There is some disagreement even today on exactly which books belong in the Bible, and there was greater variety in the ancient world. The Fathers had mixed attitudes towards the Greek intellectual tradition. Some, like Tertullian (approximately 150-240 CE), rejected it completely. Others, such as Clement of Alexandria (late second-early third centuries), thought it was divinely inspired in a sense and prepared people for the Christian message. Some even were converted by their philosophical quest. The most famous examples were Justin Martyr (approximately 100-165 CE) and St. Augustine (354-430 CE). After the disastrous revolts of the first and second centuries CE, Jews avoided quarrels with the Roman state. Christians had an ongoing quarrel with the authorities for their first three centuries, which sometimes flared into anti-Christian violence. Ethnic identity and ancestral tradition were prominent part of both Judaism and pagan religions. In the Second Temple period, Jews accepted converts readily. This slowly died down during the Rabbinic period. Christians were mostly converts from something else: "the Jew first and also the Greek, as St. Paul (?-60s CE) said in his letter to the Romans, chapter 1, verse 16. Monotheism and how not to compromise it were major concerns. Moreover, Christians were concerned with belief as well as conduct. Of course, Jews and philosophers were, too, but most pagans were not philosophers.

The concern for correct belief and to avoid idolatry led to debates with philosophy. Some, such as Hippolytus of Rome (approximately 170-235 CE), thought philosophy was a dangerous competitor. He spends much time in his *Refutation of All Heresies* outlining the major philosophies, then showing how the major heresies are derived from them, especially Platonism. Other more intellectual Christians, such as Origen (third century CE, contemporary with Plotinus) or Clement of Alexandria, believed that philosophy and mythology could be divinely inspired, to prepare people for the full Christian message. However, there were differences which grew bigger as each movement developed. The Gospel of Matthew in the New Testament has the story of the Magi, the Iranian astrologers who came to present gifts to the infant Jesus because they had seen his star in the east and knew that it portended a new king of the Jews.

Other Fathers adopted the philosophical critique of astrology. Hippolytus of Rome, in *Refutation of all Heresies*, Book IV (Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol.5, starting p. 24 or ecf5), says the same things, word for word, as Sextus Empiricus in *Against the Mathematicians*. The Clementine Recognitions (Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 8, starting p. 75 or ecf8), a prose narrative comparable to a modern novel, includes an anti-astrology message (Book IX, Chapters XVII-XXIX, among others, or p. 187) along with adventure and romance. Augustine, in *City of God* (Book V, Chapter 2-8, Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 11, pp. 85-90, Ecf11), wrote probably the most influential philosophical critique of astrology, although it contains little which is original. For example, he emphasizes the problem of twins. Curiously, in his memoir, *Confessions* (Book IV, Chapter III, Post-Nicene Fathers, vol. 10, pp. 69-70, or Ecf10) he says that in his youth he had been a strong believer in astrology,

and continued to believe after his conversion. It was only when he encountered an example of the problem of twins in real life that he was convinced by the philosophical argument against astrology (Confessions, Book VII, Chapter VI, Post-Nicene Fathers, vol. 10, pp. 105-06, or Eccl10).

Other Christians clearly disagreed. The Fathers would not have repeated the same arguments, century after century, if there were no need. Tertullian is clearly debating with Christian astrologers who see nothing wrong with practicing the art of the Magi. The anonymous Hermippus assumes that astrology is valid in its Platonic interpretation of Christianity (Bouche-Leclercq, *L'Astrologie grecque*, p. xv, and p. 77, n. 1). A mosaic from a third century CE tomb in Rome shows Christ driving the chariot of the sun-god and wearing his crown of rays, combined with the cross. When Constantine became interested in Christianity, he initially thought of it as a solar cult, and he ordered that Jesus' birthday be celebrated on the birthday of the Unconquered Sun, Sol Invictus, our Christmas. Some contemporaries looked to a verse in the Old Testament prophet Malachi (4:2), referring to the Sun of Justice, and identified it as a prophecy of Christ. Zeno of Verona (fourth century CE), in his sermons to newly baptized Christians, used the imagery of the twelve signs to represent the virtues the new members ought to practice (Zeno of Verona, "XXXVIII. Tractatus de XII signis ad neophitos," in *Zenonis Veronensis Tractatus*, Corpus Christianorum, Vol. 22 (Ternhout: Brepols, 1971), pp.105-6 ). Some apparently shared the view of some Jews, that God ruled the stars like everything else, and therefore their influences were legitimate to study.

Still others re-interpreted astrology in a Christian way, somewhat like the contemporary Jews. The fourth-century Priscillians identified the twelve signs with the twelve apostles. Medieval Western Christians lost the Roman higher education system with the collapse of the Roman Empire in the west by 500 CE and nearly all knowledge of astrology was lost. As we will see in term 102, higher education revived in the eleventh century and a large variety of academic works, including astrological works, were translated from Arabic into Latin. Eastern Christians lost neither the Roman Empire nor higher education. Since most astrological works in earlier had been in Greek, astrology was well-known in the Medieval East. In High Medieval art, images of God the Father or of Jesus holding the spherical universe, including zodiac, in his arms are not unknown.

### **The 1994 Catechism. Commentary from catholiclibrary.com**

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.

**St. John of Dasmascus (St. John Damascene) c.675-749.**

Very influential Greek theologian from wealthy Christian family in Damascus. He succeeded his father as the chief representative of the Christians to the Caliph. Withdrew from this office c.716 and went to live in a monastery near Jerusalem.

Two major works:

*Sacra Parallela*, survives only in fragments, vast compilation of Scriptural and Patristic texts on the Christian moral and ascetic life.

*Fount of Wisdom*, in three parts. Third part, 'De Fide Orthodoxa' is comprehensive presentation of Patristic teachings on main items of theology.

De fide II, 7 (PG 94, col, 893) was quoted by Aquinas, Summa Contra Gentiles III.84:

'different planets establish in us diverse temperaments, habits and dispositions'.

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**To:** culture@caol.demon.co.uk  
**Subject:** Biblical reference to Sun, Moon, and stars  
**From:** Curtis Williams <curtiswilliams1@cox.net>  
**Date:** 06 August 2005 22:45:11

There are celestial bodies and there are terrestrial bodies, but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory for the sun and another for the moon, and another glory for the stars, for one star differeth from another in glory. 1Cor. 15:40-1.

The Bible has nine references to witchcraft, eleven to wizardry or familiar spirits, often imagined to have drawn their power from the stars. But its attitude toward the stars, "good" spirits and spirituality, is positive. St. Paul's reference to stars is probably closer to reality than others, but he believed in the resurrection of the dead, (1 Cor. 15:36), not understanding that life is continuous and seeds do not die, and that there is a common element to all flesh, whether bird, fish or mammal.

Revelations names the third star, a plague from the Third Angel, Wormwood. Rev. 8:11. Saint John the Divine promises to give the Morning Star and great power to him that overcometh. (Rev. 2:26-29)

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Strachan, Gordon, *Christ and the Cosmos*, Dunbar: Labarum Publications 1985.

Weigelius, Valentine, *Astrology Theologised*.

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<http://www.flash.net/~blhill/pages.aux/astrology/resrc.guide.4.html>  
Contains a substantial bibliography of texts and links to the PhD thesis by Lester Ness: 'Astrology and Judaism in Late Antiquity'.

Robert Zoller's article on Jewish Astrology at [www.new-library.com/zoller](http://www.new-library.com/zoller) deals with later, Medieval Jewish attitudes to astrology and the works of leading Jewish astrologers such as Messahallah and Ibn Ezra.

## Books on the astrological origins of Judaism and Christianity

There is a whole genre of books, mainly by astrologers, which either overemphasise the role of astrology in the Bible, or argue that Judaism, Christianity and astrology are entirely compatible. Such books are properly seen as part of modern culture rather than historical works.

E. W. Bullinger, *The Witness of the Stars*, 1893, on line at [http://philologos.org/\\_\\_\\_eb-tws/default.htm](http://philologos.org/___eb-tws/default.htm)

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Concordance for the Bible at <http://www.concordance.com/cgi-bin/booksearch.pl>

Catholic Encyclopaedia at <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/>  
(See entries on 'Astrology' and 'Astronomy in the Bible', plus other specific entries.)

Astrology is at <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02018e.htm>

Catholic University, Virginia, statements by Church Fathers on Astrology  
<http://www.catholic.com/library/astrology.asp>

*The Jewish Encyclopedia*, "Astrology", on-line with original pages at <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=2051&letter=A&search=astrology>

### References

Clement of Rome, First Epistle to the Corinthians, prob mid-2nd century  
[http://www.bible.ca/history/fathers/ANF-01/anf01-05.htm#P317\\_51126](http://www.bible.ca/history/fathers/ANF-01/anf01-05.htm#P317_51126)

## Chapter XX.-The Peace and Harmony of the Universe.

The heavens, revolving under His government, are subject to Him in peace. Day and night run the course appointed by Him, in no wise hindering each other. The sun and moon, with the companies of the stars, roll on in harmony according to His command, within their prescribed limits, and without any deviation. The fruitful earth, according to His will, brings forth food in abundance, at the proper seasons, for man and beast and all the living beings upon it, never hesitating, nor changing any of the ordinances which He has fixed. The unsearchable places of abysses, and the indescribable arrangements of the lower world, are restrained by the same laws. The vast unmeasurable sea, gathered together by His working into various basins,<sup>86</sup> never passes beyond the bounds placed around it, but does as He has commanded. For He said, "Thus far shalt thou come, and thy waves shall be broken within thee."<sup>87</sup> The ocean, impassible to man, and the worlds beyond it, are regulated by the same enactments of the Lord. The seasons of spring, summer, autumn, and winter, peacefully give place to one another. The winds

in their several quarters<sup>88</sup> fulfil, at the proper time, their service without hindrance. The ever-flowing fountains, formed both for enjoyment and health, furnish without fail their breasts for the life of men. The very smallest of living beings meet together in peace and concord. All these the great Creator and Lord of all has appointed to exist in peace and harmony; while He does good to all, but most abundantly to us who have fled for refuge to His compassions through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom be glory and majesty for ever and ever. Amen.

The new state Christianity was keenly absorbing the salvational doctrines of near eastern solar religion.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Weber, Max, *The Sociology of Religion*, trans. Ephraim Fischhoff, 4th edn., Boston: Beacon Press 1963, p. 71