

7) Great Apostasy Brief on Occultism

By Richard Joseph Michael

All of the scholastics were guilty of one form or another of occultism either by sins of commission, omission, or association. For example, all of the scholastics either promoted or did not sufficiently condemn the following things or did not sufficiently denounce those who promoted them: Astrology, Witchcraft, Kabala, the magical use of stones and gems, and other forms of occultism.

Astrology

Many nominal Catholics, apostate antipopes included, during the Renaissance era were non-Catholic idolaters for practicing or allowing astrology.

Nominal *Catholic Encyclopedia*, Astrology, by Max Jacobi, 1907: “Up to the time of the crusades, Christian countries in general were spared any trouble from a degenerate astrology. But the gradually increasing influence of Arabic learning upon the civilization of the West, which reached its highest point at the time of the crusades was unavoidably followed by the spread of the false theories of astrology. This was a natural result of the amalgamation of the teachings of pure astronomy with astrology at the Mahammedan seats of learning. The spread of astrology was also furthered by the Jewish scholars living in Christian lands, for they considered astrology as a necessary part of their cabalistic and Talmudic studies. The celebrated didactic poem ‘Imago Mundi,’ written by Gauthier of Metz in 1245, has a whole chapter on astrology. Pierre d’Ailly, the noted French theologian and astronomer, wrote several treatises on the subject. The public importance of astrology grew as the internal disorders of the Church increased and the papal and imperial power declined. Towards the close of the Middle Ages nearly every petty prince, as well as every ruler of importance, had his court astrologer upon whose ambiguous utterances the weal and the woe of the whole country often depended. Such a person was Angelo Catto, the astrologer of Louis XI [1423-1483] of France.

“The revival of classical learning brought with it a second period of prosperity for astrology. Among the civilized peoples of the Renaissance period, so profoundly stirred by the all-prevailing religious, social, and political ferment, the astrological teaching which had come to light with other treasures of ancient Hellenic learning found many ardent disciples. The romantic trend of the age and its highly cultivated sensuality were conditions which contributed to place this art in a position far higher than any it had attained in its former period of prosperity. The forerunners of Humanism busied themselves with astrology... Towards the end of the thirteenth century, the Florentines employed Guido Bonatti as their official astrologer; and, although Florence then stood alone in this respect, it was scarcely a hundred years later when astrology had entered in earnest upon its triumphant course, and a Cecco d’Ascoli was already its devoted adherent...

“Emperors and popes became votaries of astrology—the Emperors Charles IV and V [RJMI: father of the apostate King Philip II], and Popes Sixtus IV, Julius II, Leo X, and Paul III. When these rulers lived, astrology was, so to say, the regulator of official life; it is a fact characteristic of the age, that at the papal and imperial courts ambassadors were not received in audience until the court astrologer had been consulted.

“Regiomontanus, the distinguished Bavarian mathematician, practised astrology, which from that time on assumed the character of the bread-winning profession, and as such was not beneath the dignity of so lofty an intellect as Kepler. Thus had astrology once more become the foster-mother of all astronomers. In the judgment of the men of the Renaissance—and this was the age of a Nicholas Copernicus—the most profound astronomical researches and theories were only profitable in so far as they aided in the development of astrology.

“Among the zealous patrons of the art were the Medici. Catharine de’ Medici made astrology popular in France. She erected an astrological observatory for herself near Paris, and her court astrologer was the celebrated ‘magician’ Michel de Notredame (Nostradamus) who in 1555 published his principal work on astrology—a work still regarded as authoritative among the followers of this art. Another well-known man was Lucas Gauricus,

the court astrologer of Popes Leo X and Clement VII, who published a large number of astrological treatises... There were special professors of astrology, besides those for astronomy, at the Universities of Pavia, Bologna, and even at the Sapienza during the pontificate of Leo X, while at times these astrologers outranked the astronomers. The three intellectual centres of astrology in the most brilliant period of the Renaissance were Bologna, Milan, and Mantua...

“In the Renaissance, religion, also, was subordinated to the dictation of astrology. The hypothesis of an astrological epoch of the world for each religion was widely believed by Italian astrologers of the time, who obtained the theory from Arabo-Judaic sources...

“Extraordinary examples of the glorification of astrology in Italy during the Renaissance are the frescoes painted by Miretto in the Sala della Ragione at Pavia, and the frescoes in Borso’s summer palace at Florence. Petrarch, as well, notwithstanding his public antagonism to astrology, was not, until his prime, entirely free from its taint. In this connection his relations with the famous astrologer, Mayno de Mayneri, are significant (*Cf. Rajna, Giorn. stor.*, X, 101, *seq.*)...

“The greatest astronomers were still obliged to devote their time to making astrological predictions at princely courts for the sake of gain; Tycho Brahe made such calculations for the Emperor Rudolph II, and Kepler himself, the most distinguished astronomer of the age, was the imperial court astrologer. Kepler was also obliged to cast horoscopes for Wallenstein, who later came completely under the influence of the alchemist and astrologer Giambattista Zenno of Genoa, the Seni of Schiller’s ‘Wallenstein’...”

“One of the greatest merits of the mission preachers of that day was the determined war which they waged against Astrology. It would be impossible to stigmatise the evil effects of this superstition more incisively and directly than was done by such men as Bernardino of Siena, Antonio of Vercelli, Roberto da Lecce, and Gabriele Barletta.¹ Many of the Humanists also set their faces against Astrology;² ...But of all the writings of that day directed against Astrology and also against the one-sided infatuation for classical literature, the work of Pico della Mirandola is by far the most striking and effective.³” (v. 5, Intro., pt. 2, pp. 147-151)

(For more information, see RJMI book *The Great Apostasy: Astrology.*)

Witchcraft

The History of Popes, by the apostate Ludwig Pastor, 1891-1898: “Astrology, however, was only one of many other prevalent superstitions. Very many of the Humanists were amazingly credulous in regard to wonders and prophecies... ‘The influence of the demonology of the later paganism can distinctly be traced in prevailing beliefs on that subject in the Renaissance. The printing of the works of Jamblichus or Abammon, on the Egyptian mysteries, in a Latin translation towards the end of the 15th Century, is a proof of this... There was a revival also of the belief in the possibility of subjecting demons and obliging them to work for human ends... Many of the errors into which the philosophers of the age of the Renaissance fell, were, like these superstitions, connected with the classical craze.” (v. 5, Intro., pt. 2, p. 152)

A History of the Inquisition of the Middle Ages, by Henry Charles Lea, 1901: “Elsewhere throughout Europe, by the end of the twelfth century, the repression of sorcery seems to have been well-nigh abandoned by both secular and ecclesiastical authorities... So easily were such offences condoned that in the case of a priest who, to recover something stolen from his church, employed a magician and looked into an astrolabe, Alexander only ordered the punishment of a year’s suspension, and this decision was embodied by Gregory IX. in the canon law as a precedent to be followed. This method of divination involved the invocation of spirits, and was wholly unlawful, yet it was employed without scruple... A synod of Anjou, in 1294, declares that according to the canons priests should expel from their parishes all diviners, soothsayers, sorcerers, and the like, and laments that they were permitted to

¹ Footnote *: “Güdemann, 222-4. Rob. da Lecce was specially severe against Alchemy: Quadrag. de Peccatis, 122. Savonarola deserves mention here also as a vigorous opponent of superstition. *Cf. Geffcken*, 208. Bapt. Mantuanus expresses himself very strongly against the Alchemists of his day: *De Patientia*, I. III, c. 2. *Cf. ibid.* c. 12, against Astrologers.”

² Footnote †: “*Cf. Voigt, Wiederbelebung*, II., 492 *seq.*, ed. 2.”

³ Footnote §: “*Burckhardt*, I., 244, ed. 3.”

increase and multiply without hindrance, to remedy which all who know of such persons are ordered to report them to the episcopal court, in order that their horrible malignity may be restrained⁴... the supineness of the Church with regard to such offences is remarkable.”⁵

Kabala

The History of Popes, by the apostate Ludwig Pastor, 1891-1898: “Ficino’s young friend Pico della Mirandola, deserves perhaps to be called the most brilliantly gifted of all the members of the Platonic Academy in Florence. Like his master he sought to demonstrate the fundamental agreement of all the heathen philosophers with each other, and with Christian scholasticism and mysticism. In his system, however, the most prominent place is given, not to Plato, but to the fantastic esoteric doctrines of the Kabbala. This attempt to find, in Jewish mysticism, a better support for Christianity than in the old paths of the great theologians, can only be characterised as a mistake and a weakness [RJMI: idolatry, witchcraft, and heresy].” (v. 5, Intro., pt. 2, p. 154)... Johann Reuchlin,⁶ who had a natural inclination towards the Church, and was much esteemed in Germany for his personal qualities as well as for his knowledge of Greek, and still more of Hebrew, had become imbued with the doctrines of a fanatical theosophy, induced by his study of the Jewish Kabbala, and encouraged by his own propensity for mystical subtleties. He expressed his opinions in two books, ‘Vom wunderartigen Wort’ and ‘Uber kabbalistische Kunst.’ ...His views were calculated to sow confusion in the brains of the youth of Germany, and give an impetus to the inclination, already existing among them, to cast themselves adrift, at the expense of Christianity, from all dogmatic teaching.” (v. 7, c. 6, pt. 1, p. 319)

(For more information on occultism, see RJMI book *The Great Apostasy: Other Occult Practices*.)

Images, stones, and gems

The magical use of images, stones and gems was also practiced. One of the most prominent practitioners of this occultism was the apostate Albert the Great Wretch:

Apostate Albert the Great Wretch, *Speculum Astronomiae*, c. 1260: “[Chap. 11] Astronomical images... obtains [its] virtue solely from the celestial figure... After, therefore, the image has been completed, along with certain other conditions which must be observed, it should be buried in the middle of [that place] from which the species itself is to be banished, with some earth taken from the four quarters of the same place put in the belly of the image. But if the image is made in order to attain love and profit, let it be made according to the opposite [way] to what I have said, with the addition that its shape is to be engraved under an elected hour; and it will have a [good] effect from the celestial virtue by the command of God, because [the images] found in this sensible world [made] from the four elements obey the celestial images [i.e., the constellations] of the heavens.”⁷

In the below quote, Albert teaches that not just astrological images but also mythological images when properly aligned with the stars and planets can affect men, other creatures, and events. Hence he also lends credence not only to astrology and images aligned with the stars and planets to affect men but also to the false gods and religions of mythology:

Apostate Albert the Great Wretch, *Book of Minerals*, c. 1260, “The Meaning of the Images on Stones”: ...The Ram (Aries) or the Lion (Leo) or the Archer (Sagittarius) carved [on stones] by reason of Fire and the Eastern triplicity, indicate that stones have a property against fevers and such infirmities as dropsy, paralysis, and the like. And since heat has a

⁴ Footnote *: “Roger Bacon Epist. de Secretis Operibus Artis. C. i., ii. (M. R. Series, pp 523-7). Th. Cantimprat. Bonum universal. Lib. Ii. c. 56. —Praecept. Antiq. Rotomag. c. 109 (Bessin, Concl. Rotomagens. II. 67, 76). —Durandi Specul. Juris Lib. iv. Partic. iv. Rubr. de Sortilegiis. —Synod. Andegavens. ann. 1294 c. 2 (D’Achery, I. 737).”

⁵ v. 3, c. 4, pp. 422, 426.

⁶ Footnote *: “See Geiger, J. Reuchlin., Leipzig, 1871. Cf. Janssen-Pastor, I., 18, 116 *seqq.*; II., 18, 41-56; Paulus, Diederichsen Dominikaner, 94-102.”

⁷ Contained in *The “Speculum Astronomiae” and Its Enigma*, by Paola Zambelli, 1990. Chap. “Albertus Magnus, *Speculum Astronomiae*,” pp. 240-249.

beneficial effect, these are said to make their wearers skillful and clever, and to raise them to positions of honour in the world; the Lion especially [has this effect].”⁸

In the following quote, Albert the Wretch says that stones, metals, stars, and planets have creative and influential powers and refers to Hermes Trismegistus, the pagan philosopher, astrologer, and believer in mythology, as his “Father”:

Apostate Albert the Great Wretch, *Book of Minerals*, c. 1260: “Hermes, indeed, seems to have been the author of this opinion, although Plato later followed him in it. And the alchemists seem to have taken it from them, declaring that precious stones have the power of the [fixed] stars and constellations, and the seven kinds of metals have their forms from the seven planets of the lower spheres; and thus the powers of the heavens are first in producing results on earth, making the planets, as it were, secondary [in importance]. In support of this declaration they say—what is indeed true—that the heavenly sphere imparts motion to Earth, and this is the reason why things produced from Earth are so varied in their shapes and so numerous, as compared with things produced in any of the other elements. And Father Hermes Trismegistus seems to confirm this opinion when he says, ‘Earth is the mother of metals and Heaven their father’ and ‘Earth is impregnated with them in mountains, fields, and plains, and in waters,’ and everywhere else.”⁹

In the 15th century, the apostate Jean Gerson correctly said that Albert the Great Wretch approved of astrology and the use of engraved stones to affect men, other creatures, and events:

Apostate Jean Gerson (d. 1429), *Opera Omnia*, 15th century: “Albertus Magnus wrote a short work on this subject entitled *Speculum Alberti*, relating that in his time some persons wanted to destroy books by Albumasar and several others. Preserving honour to so great a Doctor [RJMI: to so great an apostate], it nevertheless seems that just as [Albertus], in expounding books of natural science, especially those written by Peripatetics, took too great care, more than was appropriate for a Christian Doctor and without adding anything concerning Christian piety, so also in his approving some astrological books, especially those on images, on birth-horoscopes, on engraved stones, on characters, and on interrogations, he came down on the side of irrational superstitions.”

Even though Gerson correctly denounced Albert the Great Wretch for believing in these things, he did not denounce Albert as a non-Catholic idolater nor denounce his works as heretical and idolatrous. Instead, Gerson honored Albert and called him a great Doctor. Hence the apostate Gerson sinned by omission and shared equally in Albert’s idolatrous guilt. Pope St. Leo the Great, on the other hand, teaches that whosoever does these things has “no place in the Catholic Church”; and “a man who gives himself up to such convictions separates himself from the body of Christ altogether.”

(For more information, see RJMI book *The Hellenization of Christianity by the Anti-Church Fathers and Scholastics*: Scholastics: Albert the Great Wretch.)

For the glory of God; in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Michael, St. Joseph, Ss. Joachim and Anne, St. John the Baptist, the other angels and saints; and for the salvation of men

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⁸ Translated by Dorothy Wyckoff, 1967; b. 2, c. 5.

⁹ Ibid., b. 3, c. 6.