

St. Thomas Aquinas

The Summa Theologica

(Benziger Bros. edition, 1947)

Translated by

Fathers of the English Dominican Province

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OF SUPERSTITION IN DIVINATIONS (EIGHT ARTICLES)

We must now consider superstition in divinations, under which head there are eight points of inquiry:

- (1) Whether divination is a sin?
 - (2) Whether it is a species of superstition?
 - (3) Of the species of divination;
 - (4) Of divination by means of demons;
 - (5) Of divination by the stars;
 - (6) Of divination by dreams;
 - (7) Of divination by auguries and like observances;
 - (8) Of divination by lots.
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Whether divination is a sin?

Objection 1: It would seem that divination is not a sin. Divination is derived from something "divine": and things that are divine pertain to holiness rather than to sin. Therefore it seems

Objection 2: Further, Augustine says (De Lib. Arb. i, 1): "Who dares to say that learning is an evil?" and again: "I could nowise admit that intelligence can be an evil." But some arts are divinatory, as the Philosopher states (De Memor. i): and divination itself would seem to pertain to a certain intelligence of the truth. Therefore it seems that divination is not a sin.

Objection 3: Further, there is no natural inclination to evil; because nature inclines only to its like. But men by natural inclination seek to foreknow future events; and this belongs to divination. Therefore divination is not a sin.

On the contrary, It is written ([Dt. 18:10,11](#)): "Neither let there be found among you... any one that consulteth pythonic spirits, or fortune tellers": and it is stated in the Decretals (26, qu. v, can. Qui divinationes): "Those who seek for divinations shall be liable to a penance of five years' duration, according to the fixed grades of penance."

I answer that, Divination denotes a foretelling of the future. The future may be foreknown in two ways: first in its causes, secondly in itself. Now the causes of the future are threefold: for some produce their effects, of necessity and always; and such like future effects can be foreknown and foretold with certainty, from considering their causes, even as astrologers foretell a coming eclipse. Other causes produce their effects, not of necessity and always, but for the most part, yet they rarely fail: and from such like causes their future effects can be foreknown, not indeed with certainty, but by a kind of conjecture, even as astrologers by considering the stars can foreknow and foretell things concerning rains and droughts, and physicians, concerning health and death. Again, other causes, considered in themselves, are indifferent; and this is chiefly the case in the rational powers, which stand in relation to opposites, according to the Philosopher [*Metaph. viii, 2,5,8]. Such like effects, as also those which ensue from natural causes by chance and in the minority of instances, cannot be foreknown from a consideration of their causes, because these causes have no determinate inclination to produce these effects. Consequently such like effects cannot be foreknown unless they be considered in themselves. Now man cannot consider these effects in themselves except when they are present, as when he sees Socrates running or walking: the consideration of such things in themselves before they occur is proper to God, Who alone in His eternity sees the future as though it were present, as stated in the FP, Question [14], Article [13]; FP, Question [57], Article [3]; FP, Question [86], Article [4]. Hence it is written ([Is. 41:23](#)): "Show the things that are to come hereafter, and we shall know that ye are gods." Therefore if anyone presume to foreknow or foretell such like future things by any means whatever, except by divine revelation, he manifestly usurps what belongs to God. It is for this reason that certain men are called divines: wherefore Isidore says (Etym. viii, 9): "They are called divines, as though they were full of God. For they pretend to be filled with the Godhead, and by a deceitful fraud they forecast the future to men."

Accordingly it is not called divination, if a man foretells things that happen of necessity, or in the majority of instances, for the like can be foreknown by human reason: nor again if anyone knows other contingent future things, through divine revelation: for then he does not divine, i.e. cause something divine, but rather receives something divine. Then only is a man said to divine, when he usurps to himself, in an undue manner, the foretelling of future events: and this is manifestly a sin. Consequently divination is always a sin; and for this reason Jerome says in his commentary on Mich. 3:9, seqq. that "divination is always taken in an evil sense."

Reply to Objection 1: Divination takes its name not from a rightly ordered share of something divine, but from an undue usurpation thereof, as stated above.

[Donate bitcoin.](#) St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [summa](#) » [SS](#) » [SS095.html](#) of necessity or frequently, and these do not pertain to divination. But there are no true arts or sciences for the knowledge of other future events, but only vain inventions of the devil's deceit, as Augustine says (De Civ. Dei xxi, 8).

Reply to Objection 3: Man has a natural inclination to know the future by human means, but not by the undue means of divination.

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Whether divination is a species of superstition?

Objection 1: It would seem that divination is not a species of superstition. The same thing cannot be a species of diverse genera. Now divination is apparently a species of curiosity, according to Augustine (De Vera Relig. xxxviii) [*Cf. De Doctr. Christ. ii, 23,24; De Divin. Daem. 3]. Therefore it is not, seemingly, a species of superstition.

Objection 2: Further, just as religion is due worship, so is superstition undue worship. But divination does not seem to pertain to undue worship. Therefore it does not pertain to superstition.

Objection 3: Further, superstition is opposed to religion. But in true religion nothing is to be found corresponding as a contrary to divination. Therefore divination is not a species of superstition.

On the contrary, Origen says in his Peri Archon [*The quotation is from his sixteenth homily on the Book of Numbers]: "There is an operation of the demons in the administering of foreknowledge, comprised, seemingly, under the head of certain arts exercised by those who have enslaved themselves to the demons, by means of lots, omens, or the observance of shadows. I doubt not that all these things are done by the operation of the demons." Now, according to Augustine (De Doctr. Christ. ii, 20,23), "whatever results from fellowship between demons and men is superstitious." Therefore divination is a species of superstition.

I answer that, As stated above ([Article \[1\]](#); [Questions \[92\]](#),94), superstition denotes undue divine worship. Now a thing pertains to the worship of God in two ways: in one way, it is something offered to God; as a sacrifice, an oblation, or something of the kind: in another way, it is something divine that is assumed, as stated above with regard to an oath ([Question \[89\]](#), [Article \[4\]](#), ad 2). Wherefore superstition includes not only idolatrous sacrifices offered to demons, but also recourse to the help of the demons for the purpose of doing or knowing something. But all divination results from the demons' operation, either because the demons are expressly invoked that the future may be made known, or because the demons thrust themselves into futile searchings of the future, in order to entangle men's minds with vain conceits. Of this kind of vanity it is written ([Ps. 39:5](#)): "Who hath not regard to vanities and lying follies." Now it is vain to seek knowledge of the future, when one tries to get it from a

Reply to Objection 1: Divination is a kind of curiosity with regard to the end in view, which is foreknowledge of the future; but it is a kind of superstition as regards the mode of operation.

Reply to Objection 2: This kind of divination pertains to the worship of the demons, inasmuch as one enters into a compact, tacit or express with the demons.

Reply to Objection 3: In the New Law man's mind is restrained from solicitude about temporal things: wherefore the New Law contains no institution for the foreknowledge of future events in temporal matters. On the other hand in the Old Law, which contained earthly promises, there were consultations about the future in connection with religious matters. Hence where it is written ([Is. 8:19](#)): "And when they shall say to you: Seek of pythons and of diviners, who mutter in their enchantments," it is added by way of answer: "Should not the people seek of their God, a vision for the living and the dead? [*Vulg.: 'seek of their God, for the living of the dead?']"

In the New Testament, however, there were some possessed of the spirit of prophecy, who foretold many things about future events.

In the New Testament, however, there were some possessed of the spirit of prophecy, who foretold many things about future events.

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Whether we ought to distinguish several species of divination?

Objection 1: It would seem that we should not distinguish several species of divination. Where the formality of sin is the same, there are not seemingly several species of sin. Now there is one formality of sin in all divinations, since they consist in entering into compact with the demons in order to know the future. Therefore there are not several species of divination.

Objection 2: Further, a human act takes its species from its end, as stated above ([FS, Question \[1\]](#), [Article \[3\]](#); [FS, Question \[18\]](#), [Article \[6\]](#)). But all divination is directed to one end, namely, the foretelling of the future. Therefore all divinations are of one species.

Objection 3: Further, signs do not vary the species of a sin, for whether one detracts by word writing or gestures, it is the same species of sin. Now divinations seem to differ merely according to the various signs whence the foreknowledge of the future is derived. Therefore there are not several species of divination.

On the contrary, Isidore enumerates various species of divination (Etym. viii, 9).

I answer that, As stated above ([Article \[2\]](#)), all divinations seek to acquire foreknowledge of future events, by means of some counsel and help of a demon, who is either expressly called

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things unknown to men, but known to him in such manners as have been explained in the FP, Question [57], Article [3]. When demons are expressly invoked, they are wont to foretell the future in many ways. Sometimes they offer themselves to human sight and hearing by mock apparitions in order to foretell the future: and this species is called "prestigiatio" because man's eyes are blindfolded [praestringuntur]. Sometimes they make use of dreams, and this is called "divination by dreams": sometimes they employ apparitions or utterances of the dead, and this species is called "necromancy," for as Isidore observes (Etym. viii) in Greek, {nekron} "means dead and {manteia} divination, because after certain incantations and the sprinkling of blood, the dead seem to come to life, to divine and to answer questions." Sometimes they foretell the future through living men, as in the case of those who are possessed: this is divination by "pythons," of whom Isidore says that "pythons are so called from Pythius Apollo, who was said to be the inventor of divination." Sometimes they foretell the future by means of shapes or signs which appear in inanimate beings. If these signs appear in some earthly body such as wood, iron or polished stone, it is called "geomancy," if in water "hydromancy," if in the air "aeromancy," if in fire "pyromancy," if in the entrails of animals sacrificed on the altars of demons, "aruspicy."

The divination which is practiced without express invocation of the demons is of two kinds. The first is when, with a view to obtain knowledge of the future, we take observations in the disposition of certain things. If one endeavor to know the future by observing the position and movements of the stars, this belongs to "astrologers," who are also called "genethliacs," because they take note of the days on which people are born. If one observe the movements and cries of birds or of any animals, or the sneezing of men, or the sudden movements of limbs, this belongs in general to "augury," which is so called from the chattering of birds [avium garritu], just as "auspice" is derived from watching birds [avium inspectione]. These are chiefly wont to be observed in birds, the former by the ear, the latter by the eye. If, however, these observations have for their object men's words uttered unintentionally, which someone twist so as to apply to the future that he wishes to foreknow, then it is called an "omen": and as Valerius Maximus [*De Dict. Fact. Memor. i, 5] remarks, "the observing of omens has a touch of religion mingled with it, for it is believed to be founded not on a chance movement, but on divine providence. It was thus that when the Romans were deliberating whether they would change their position, a centurion happened to exclaim at the time: 'Standard-bearer, fix the banner, we had best stand here': and on hearing these words they took them as an omen, and abandoned their intention of advancing further." If, however, the observation regards the dispositions, that occur to the eye, of figures in certain bodies, there will be another species of divination: for the divination that is taken from observing the lines of the hand is called "chiromancy," i.e. divination of the hand (because {cheir} is the Greek for hand): while the divination which is taken from signs appearing in the shoulder-blades of an animal is called "spatulamancy."

To this second species of divination, which is without express invocation of the demons, belongs that which is practiced by observing certain things done seriously by men in the research of the occult, whether by drawing lots, which is called "geomancy"; or by observing the shapes resulting from molten lead poured into water; or by observing which of several sheets of paper, with or without writing upon them, a person may happen to draw; or by holding out several unequal sticks and noting who takes the greater or the lesser. or by throwing dice, and observing who throws the highest score; or by observing what catches the eye when one opens a book, all of which are named "sortilege."

Accordingly it is clear that there are three kinds of divination. The first is when the demons are invoked openly, this comes under the head of "necromancy"; the second is merely an

[Donate bitcoin](#). St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [summa](#) » [SS](#) » [SS095.html](#)y"; while the third consists in doing something in order to discover the occult; and this belongs to "sortilege." Under each of these many others are contained, as explained above.

Reply to Objection 1: In all the aforesaid there is the same general, but not the same special, character of sin: for it is much more grievous to invoke the demons than to do things that deserve the demons' interference.

Reply to Objection 2: Knowledge of the future or of the occult is the ultimate end whence divination takes its general formality. But the various species are distinguished by their proper objects or matters, according as the knowledge of the occult is sought in various things.

Reply to Objection 3: The things observed by diviners are considered by them, not as signs expressing what they already know, as happens in detraction, but as principles of knowledge. Now it is evident that diversity of principles diversifies the species, even in demonstrative sciences.

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Whether divination practiced by invoking the demons is unlawful?

Objection 1: It would seem that divination practiced by invoking the demons is not unlawful. Christ did nothing unlawful, according to 1 Pt. 2:22, "Who did no sin." Yet our Lord asked the demon: "What is thy name?" and the latter replied: "My name is Legion, for we are many" (Mk. 5:9). Therefore it seems lawful to question the demons about the occult.

Objection 2: Further, the souls of the saints do not encourage those who ask unlawfully. Yet Samuel appeared to Saul when the latter inquired of the woman that had a divining spirit, concerning the issue of the coming war ([1 Kgs. 28:8, sqq.](#)). Therefore the divination that consists in questioning demons is not unlawful.

Objection 3: Further, it seems lawful to seek the truth from one who knows, if it be useful to know it. But it is sometimes useful to know what is hidden from us, and can be known through the demons, as in the discovery of thefts. Therefore divination by questioning demons is not unlawful.

On the contrary, It is written ([Dt. 18:10,11](#)): "Neither let there be found among you... anyone that consulteth soothsayers... nor... that consulteth pythonic spirits."

I answer that, All divination by invoking demons is unlawful for two reasons. The first is gathered from the principle of divination, which is a compact made expressly with a demon by the very fact of invoking him. This is altogether unlawful; wherefore it is written against certain persons ([Is. 28:15](#)): "You have said: We have entered into a league with death, and we have made a covenant with hell." And still more grievous would it be if sacrifice were offered or reverence paid to the demon invoked. The second reason is gathered from the result. For

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Reply to Objection 1: According to Bede's commentary on Lk. 8:30, "Our Lord inquired, not through ignorance, but in order that the disease, which he tolerated, being made public, the power of the Healer might shine forth more graciously." Now it is one thing to question a demon who comes to us of his own accord (and it is lawful to do so at times for the good of others, especially when he can be compelled, by the power of God, to tell the truth) and another to invoke a demon in order to gain from him knowledge of things hidden from us.

Reply to Objection 2: According to Augustine (Ad Simplic. ii, 3), "there is nothing absurd in believing that the spirit of the just man, being about to smite the king with the divine sentence, was permitted to appear to him, not by the sway of magic art or power, but by some occult dispensation of which neither the witch nor Saul was aware. Or else the spirit of Samuel was not in reality aroused from his rest, but some phantom or mock apparition formed by the machinations of the devil, and styled by Scripture under the name of Samuel, just as the images of things are wont to be called by the names of those things."

Reply to Objection 3: No temporal utility can compare with the harm to spiritual health that results from the research of the unknown by invoking the demon.

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Whether divination by the stars is unlawful?

Objection 1: It would seem that divination by the stars is not unlawful. It is lawful to foretell effects by observing their causes: thus a physician foretells death from the disposition of the disease. Now the heavenly bodies are the cause of what takes place in the world, according to Dionysius (Div. Nom. iv). Therefore divination by the stars is not unlawful.

Objection 2: Further, human science originates from experiments, according to the Philosopher (Metaph. i, 1). Now it has been discovered through many experiments that the observation of the stars is a means whereby some future events may be known beforehand. Therefore it would seem not unlawful to make use of this kind of divination.

Objection 3: Further, divination is declared to be unlawful in so far as it is based on a compact made with the demons. But divination by the stars contains nothing of the kind, but merely an observation of God's creatures. Therefore it would seem that this species of divination is not unlawful.

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mathematicians, I consulted without scruple; because they seemed to use no sacrifice, nor to pray to any spirit for their divinations which art, however, Christian and true piety rejects and condemns."

I answer that, As stated above ([Articles \[1\],2](#)), the operation of the demon thrusts itself into those divinations which are based on false and vain opinions, in order that man's mind may become entangled in vanity and falsehood. Now one makes use of a vain and false opinion if, by observing the stars, one desires to foreknow the future that cannot be forecast by their means. Wherefore we must consider what things can be foreknown by observing the stars: and it is evident that those things which happen of necessity can be foreknown by this mean,: even so astrologers forecast a future eclipse.

However, with regard to the foreknowledge of future events acquired by observing the stars there have been various opinions. For some have stated that the stars signify rather than cause the things foretold by means of their observation. But this is an unreasonable statement: since every corporeal sign is either the effect of that for which it stands (thus smoke signifies fire whereby it is caused), or it proceeds from the same cause, so that by signifying the cause, in consequence it signifies the effect (thus a rainbow is sometimes a sign of fair weather, in so far as its cause is the cause of fair weather). Now it cannot be said that the dispositions and movements of the heavenly bodies are the effect of future events; nor again can they be ascribed to some common higher cause of a corporeal nature, although they are referable to a common higher cause, which is divine providence. on the contrary the appointment of the movements and positions of the heavenly bodies by divine providence is on a different principle from the appointment of the occurrence of future contingencies, because the former are appointed on a principle of necessity, so that they always occur in the same way, whereas the latter are appointed on a principle of contingency, so that the manner of their occurrence is variable. Consequently it is impossible to acquire foreknowledge of the future from an observation of the stars, except in so far as effects can be foreknown from their causes.

Now two kinds of effects escape the causality of heavenly bodies. In the first place all effects that occur accidentally, whether in human affairs or in the natural order, since, as it is proved in *Metaph. vi* [*Ed. Did. v, 3], an accidental being has no cause, least of all a natural cause, such as is the power of a heavenly body, because what occurs accidentally, neither is a "being" properly speaking, nor is "one"---for instance, that an earthquake occur when a stone falls, or that a treasure be discovered when a man digs a grave---for these and like occurrences are not one thing, but are simply several things. Whereas the operation of nature has always some one thing for its term, just as it proceeds from some one principle, which is the form of a natural thing.

In the second place, acts of the free-will, which is the faculty of will and reason, escape the causality of heavenly bodies. For the intellect or reason is not a body, nor the act of a bodily organ, and consequently neither is the will, since it is in the reason, as the Philosopher shows (*De Anima iii, 4,9*). Now no body can make an impression on an incorporeal body. Wherefore it is impossible for heavenly bodies to make a direct impression on the intellect and will: for this would be to deny the difference between intellect and sense, with which position Aristotle reproaches (*De Anima iii, 3*) those who held that "such is the will of man, as is the day which the father of men and of gods," i.e. the sun or the heavens, "brings on" [**Odyssey xviii, 135*].

Hence the heavenly bodies cannot be the direct cause of the free-will's operations. Nevertheless they can be a dispositive cause of an inclination to those operations, in so far as they make an impression on the human body, and consequently on the sensitive powers which

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powers obey reason, as the Philosopher shows (De Anima iii, 11; Ethic. i, 13), this does not impose any necessity on the free-will, and man is able, by his reason, to act counter to the inclination of the heavenly bodies.

Accordingly if anyone take observation of the stars in order to foreknow casual or fortuitous future events, or to know with certitude future human actions, his conduct is based on a false and vain opinion; and so the operation of the demon introduces itself therein, wherefore it will be a superstitious and unlawful divination. On the other hand if one were to apply the observation of the stars in order to foreknow those future things that are caused by heavenly bodies, for instance, drought or rain and so forth, it will be neither an unlawful nor a superstitious divination.

Wherefore the Reply to the First Objection is evident.

Reply to Objection 2: That astrologers not unfrequently forecast the truth by observing the stars may be explained in two ways. First, because a great number of men follow their bodily passions, so that their actions are for the most part disposed in accordance with the inclination of the heavenly bodies: while there are few, namely, the wise alone, who moderate these inclinations by their reason. The result is that astrologers in many cases foretell the truth, especially in public occurrences which depend on the multitude. Secondly, because of the interference of the demons. Hence Augustine says (Gen. ad lit. ii, 17): "When astrologers tell the truth, it must be allowed that this is due to an instinct that, unknown to man, lies hidden in his mind. And since this happens through the action of unclean and lying spirits who desire to deceive man for they are permitted to know certain things about temporal affairs." Wherefore he concludes: "Thus a good Christian should beware of astrologers, and of all impious diviners, especially of those who tell the truth, lest his soul become the dupe of the demons and by making a compact of partnership with them enmesh itself in their fellowship."

This suffices for the Reply to the Third Objection.

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Whether divination by dreams is unlawful?

Objection 1: It would seem that divination by dreams is not unlawful. It is not unlawful to make use of divine instruction. Now men are instructed by God in dreams, for it is written ([Job 33:15,16](#)): "By a dream in a vision by night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, and they are sleeping in their beds, then He," God to wit, "openeth the ears of men, and teaching instructeth them in what they are to learn." Therefore it is not unlawful to make use of divination by dreams.

Objection 2: Further, those who interpret dreams, properly speaking, make use of divination by dreams. Now we read of holy men interpreting dreams: thus Joseph interpreted the dreams

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king of Babylon ([Dan. 2,4](#)). Therefore divination by dreams is not unlawful.

Objection 3: Further, it is unreasonable to deny the common experiences of men. Now it is the experience of all that dreams are significative of the future. Therefore it is useless to deny the efficacy of dreams for the purpose of divination, and it is lawful to listen to them.

On the contrary, It is written ([Dt. 18:10](#)): "Neither let there be found among you any one that... observeth dreams."

I answer that, As stated above ([Articles \[2\],6](#)), divination is superstitious and unlawful when it is based on a false opinion. Wherefore we must consider what is true in the matter of foreknowing the future from dreams. Now dreams are sometimes the cause of future occurrences; for instance, when a person's mind becomes anxious through what it has seen in a dream and is thereby led to do something or avoid something: while sometimes dreams are signs of future happenings, in so far as they are referable to some common cause of both dreams and future occurrences, and in this way the future is frequently known from dreams. We must, then, consider what is the cause of dreams, and whether it can be the cause of future occurrences, or be cognizant of them.

Accordingly it is to be observed that the cause of dreams is sometimes in us and sometimes outside us. The inward cause of dreams is twofold: one regards the soul, in so far as those things which have occupied a man's thoughts and affections while awake recur to his imagination while asleep. A such like cause of dreams is not a cause of future occurrences, so that dreams of this kind are related accidentally to future occurrences, and if at any time they concur it will be by chance. But sometimes the inward cause of dreams regards the body: because the inward disposition of the body leads to the formation of a movement in the imagination consistent with that disposition; thus a man in whom there is abundance of cold humors dreams that he is in the water or snow: and for this reason physicians say that we should take note of dreams in order to discover internal dispositions.

In like manner the outward cause of dreams is twofold, corporal and spiritual. It is corporal in so far as the sleeper's imagination is affected either by the surrounding air, or through an impression of a heavenly body, so that certain images appear to the sleeper, in keeping with the disposition of the heavenly bodies. The spiritual cause is sometimes referable to God, Who reveals certain things to men in their dreams by the ministry of the angels, according Num. 12:6, "If there be among you a prophet of the Lord, I will appear to him in a vision, or I will speak to him in a dream." Sometimes, however, it is due to the action of the demons that certain images appear to persons in their sleep, and by this means they, at times, reveal certain future things to those who have entered into an unlawful compact with them.

Accordingly we must say that there is no unlawful divination in making use of dreams for the foreknowledge of the future, so long as those dreams are due to divine revelation, or to some natural cause inward or outward, and so far as the efficacy of that cause extends. But it will be an unlawful and superstitious divination if it be caused by a revelation of the demons, with whom a compact has been made, whether explicit, through their being invoked for the purpose, or implicit, through the divination extending beyond its possible limits.

This suffices for the Replies to the Objections.

Whether divination by auguries, omens, and by like observations of external things is unlawful?

Objection 1: It would seem that divination by auguries, omens, and by like observations of external things is not unlawful. If it were unlawful holy men would not make use thereof. Now we read of Joseph that he paid attention to auguries, for it is related ([Gn. 44:5](#)) that Joseph's steward said: "The cup which you have stolen is that in which my lord drinketh and in which he is wont to divine [augurari]": and he himself afterwards said to his brethren ([Gn. 44:15](#)): "Know you not that there is no one like me in the science of divining?" Therefore it is not unlawful to make use of this kind of divination.

Objection 2: Further, birds naturally know certain things regarding future occurrences of the seasons, according to Jer. 8:7, "The kite in the air hath known her time; the turtle, the swallow, and the stork have observed the time of their coming." Now natural knowledge is infallible and comes from God. Therefore it seems not unlawful to make use of the birds' knowledge in order to know the future, and this is divination by augury.

Objection 3: Further, Gedeon is numbered among the saints ([Heb. 11:32](#)). Yet Gedeon made use of an omen, when he listened to the relation and interpreting of a dream (Judges 7:15): and Eliezer, Abraham's servant, acted in like manner ([Gn. 24](#)). Therefore it seems that this kind of divination is not unlawful.

On the contrary, It is written ([Dt. 18:10](#)): "Neither let there be found among you anyone... that observeth omens."

I answer that, The movements or cries of birds, and whatever dispositions one may consider in such things, are manifestly not the cause of future events: wherefore the future cannot be known therefrom as from its cause. It follows therefore that if anything future can be known from them, it will be because the causes from which they proceed are also the causes of future occurrences or are cognizant of them. Now the cause of dumb animals' actions is a certain instinct whereby they are inclined by a natural movement, for they are not masters of their actions. This instinct may proceed from a twofold cause. In the first place it may be due to a bodily cause. For since dumb animals have naught but a sensitive soul, every power of which is the act of a bodily organ, their soul is subject to the disposition of surrounding bodies, and primarily to that of the heavenly bodies. Hence nothing prevents some of their actions from being signs of the future, in so far as they are conformed to the dispositions of the heavenly bodies and of the surrounding air, to which certain future events are due. Yet in this matter we must observe two things: first, that such observations must not be applied to the foreknowledge of future things other than those which can be foreknown from the movements of heavenly bodies, as stated above ([Articles \[5\],6](#)): secondly, that they be not applied to other matters than those which in some way may have reference to these animals (since they acquire through the heavenly bodies a certain natural knowledge and instinct about things necessary for their life---such as changes resulting from rain and wind and so forth).

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may be seen in the dove that descended upon Christ, the raven that fed Elias, and the whale that swallowed and vomited Jonas, or by demons, who make use of these actions of dumb animals in order to entangle our minds with vain opinions. This seems to be true of all such like things; except omens, because human words which are taken for an omen are not subject to the disposition of the stars, yet are they ordered according to divine providence and sometimes according to the action of the demons.

Accordingly we must say that all such like divinations are superstitious and unlawful, if they be extended beyond the limits set according to the order of nature or of divine providence.

Reply to Objection 1: According to Augustine [*Questions. in Genes., qu. cxlv], when Joseph said that there was no one like him in the science of divining, he spoke in joke and not seriously, referring perhaps to the common opinion about him: in this sense also spoke his steward.

Reply to Objection 2: The passage quoted refers to the knowledge that birds have about things concerning them; and in order to know these things it is not unlawful to observe their cries and movements: thus from the frequent cawing of crows one might say that it will rain soon.

Reply to Objection 3: Gedeon listened to the recital and interpretation of a dream, seeing therein an omen, ordered by divine providence for his instruction. In like manner Eliezer listened to the damsel's words, having previously prayed to God.

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Whether divination by drawing lots is unlawful?

Objection 1: It would seem that divination by drawing lots is not unlawful, because a gloss of Augustine on Ps. 30:16, "My lots are in Thy hands," says: "It is not wrong to cast lots, for it is a means of ascertaining the divine will when a man is in doubt."

Objection 2: There is, seemingly, nothing unlawful in the observances which the Scriptures relate as being practiced by holy men. Now both in the Old and in the New Testament we find holy men practicing the casting of lots. For it is related (Jos. 7:14, sqq.) that Josue, at the Lord's command, pronounced sentence by lot on Achan who had stolen of the anathema. Again Saul, by drawing lots, found that his son Jonathan had eaten honey (1 Kgs. 14:58, sqq.): Jonas, when fleeing from the face of the Lord, was discovered and thrown into the sea (Jonas 1:7, sqq.): Zacharias was chosen by lot to offer incense ([Lk. 1:9](#)): and the apostles by drawing lots elected Matthias to the apostleship ([Acts 1:26](#)). Therefore it would seem that divination by lots is not unlawful.

Objection 3: Further, fighting with the fists, or "monomachy," i.e. single combat as it is called, and trial by fire and water, which are called "popular" trials, seem to come under the head of sortilege, because something unknown is sought by their means. Yet these practices seem to be

[Donate bitcoin](#). St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [summa](#) » [SS](#) » [SS095.html](#) [17:32, sqq.](#)). Therefore it would seem that divination by lot is not unlawful.

On the contrary, It is written in the Decretals (XXVI, qu. v, can. Sortes): "We decree that the casting of lots, by which means you make up your mind in all your undertakings, and which the Fathers have condemned, is nothing but divination and witchcraft. For which reason we wish them to be condemned altogether, and henceforth not to be mentioned among Christians, and we forbid the practice thereof under pain of anathema."

I answer that, As stated above ([Article \[3\]](#)), sortilege consists, properly speaking, in doing something, that by observing the result one may come to the knowledge of something unknown. If by casting lots one seeks to know what is to be given to whom, whether it be a possession, an honor, a dignity, a punishment, or some action or other, it is called "sortilege of allotment"; if one seeks to know what ought to be done, it is called "sortilege of consultation"; if one seeks to know what is going to happen, it is called "sortilege of divination." Now the actions of man that are required for sortilege and their results are not subject to the dispositions of the stars. Wherefore if anyone practicing sortilege is so minded as though the human acts requisite for sortilege depended for their result on the dispositions of the stars, his opinion is vain and false, and consequently is not free from the interference of the demons, so that a divination of this kind is superstitious and unlawful.

Apart from this cause, however, the result of sortilegious acts must needs be ascribed to chance, or to some directing spiritual cause. If we ascribe it to chance, and this can only take place in "sortilege of allotment," it does not seem to imply any vice other than vanity, as in the case of persons who, being unable to agree upon the division of something or other, are willing to draw lots for its division, thus leaving to chance what portion each is to receive.

If, on the other hand, the decision by lot be left to a spiritual cause, it is sometimes ascribed to demons. Thus we read (Ezech. 21:21) that "the king of Babylon stood in the highway, at the head of two ways, seeking divination, shuffling arrows; he inquired of the idols, and consulted entrails": sortilege of this kind is unlawful, and forbidden by the canons.

Sometimes, however, the decision is left to God, according to Prov. 16:33, "Lots are cast into the lap, but they are disposed of by the Lord": sortilege of this kind is not wrong in itself, as Augustine declares [*Enarr. ii in Ps. xxx, serm. 2; cf. Objection [1]].

Yet this may happen to be sinful in four ways. First, if one have recourse to lots without any necessity: for this would seem to amount to tempting God. Hence Ambrose, commenting on the words of Lk. 1:8, says: "He that is chosen by lot is not bound by the judgment of men." Secondly, if even in a case of necessity one were to have recourse to lots without reverence. Hence, on the Acts of the Apostles, Bede says (Super Act. Apost. i): "But if anyone, compelled by necessity, thinks that he ought, after the apostles' example, to consult God by casting lots, let him take note that the apostles themselves did not do so, except after calling together the assembly of the brethren and pouring forth prayer to God." Thirdly, if the Divine oracles be misapplied to earthly business. Hence Augustine says (ad inquisit. Januar. ii; Ep. lv): "Those who tell fortunes from the Gospel pages, though it is to be hoped that they do so rather than have recourse to consulting the demons, yet does this custom also displease me, that anyone should wish to apply the Divine oracles to worldly matters and to the vain things of this life." Fourthly, if anyone resort to the drawing of lots in ecclesiastical elections, which should be carried out by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. Wherefore, as Bede says (Super Act. Apost. i): "Before Pentecost the ordination of Matthias was decided by lot," because as yet the fulness of the Holy Ghost was not yet poured forth into the Church: "whereas the same deacons were

[Donate bitcoin.](#) St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [summa](#) » [SS](#) » [SS095.html](#) which are directed to the disposal of earthly things: in elections of this kind men frequently have recourse to lots, even as in the distribution of earthly possessions.

If, however, there be urgent necessity it is lawful to seek the divine judgment by casting lots, provided due reverence be observed. Hence Augustine says (Ep. ad Honor. ccxxviii), "If, at a time of persecution, the ministers of God do not agree as to which of them is to remain at his post lest all should flee, and which of them is to flee, lest all die and the Church be forsaken, should there be no other means of coming to an agreement, so far as I can see, they must be chosen by lot." Again he says (De Doctr. Christ. xxviii): "If thou aboundest in that which it behooves thee to give to him who hath not, and which cannot be given to two; should two come to you, neither of whom surpasses the other either in need or in some claim on thee, thou couldst not act more justly than in choosing by lot to whom thou shalt give that which thou canst not give to both."

This suffices for the Reply to the First and Second Objections.

Reply to Objection 3: The trial by hot iron or boiling water is directed to the investigation of someone's hidden sin, by means of something done by a man, and in this it agrees with the drawing of lots. But in so far as a miraculous result is expected from God, it surpasses the common generality of sortilege. Hence this kind of trial is rendered unlawful, both because it is directed to the judgment of the occult, which is reserved to the divine judgment, and because such like trials are not sanctioned by divine authority. Hence we read in a decree of Pope Stephen V [*II, qu. v., can. Consuluist i]: "The sacred canons do not approve of extorting a confession from anyone by means of the trial by hot iron or boiling water, and no one must presume, by a superstitious innovation, to practice what is not sanctioned by the teaching of the holy fathers. For it is allowable that public crimes should be judged by our authority, after the culprit has made spontaneous confession, or when witnesses have been approved, with due regard to the fear of God; but hidden and unknown crimes must be left to Him Who alone knows the hearts of the children of men." The same would seem to apply to the law concerning duels, save that it approaches nearer to the common kind of sortilege, since no miraculous effect is expected thereupon, unless the combatants be very unequal in strength or skill.