THE Church has frequently and in emphatic terms expressed her unconditioned condemnation of all forms of superstition. Founded in an age teeming with superstition, she has unceasingly waged a battle against nefarious occult practices. When the Church began to evangelize the Roman Empire she had to combat not only the paganism and immorality of the age, but also the superstitious customs intimately and vitally connected with them. And in this continued conflict with superstition the Church has always vigilantly guarded her doctrine and liturgy lest some life-sapping ritual, sprung from ancient times, germinate and flourish among the faithful.

The term superstition has been given various and diverse applications, depending upon the viewpoint of the speaker or writer. It contains the connotation of something degrading to man; all peoples have looked upon it as something to be avoided and abhorred. A man is loath to admit that he is a victim of superstition but is ever ready to label as superstitious all religions that differ from his own. What one praises as religion, another rejects and brands as superstition.

Saint Thomas defines superstition as a vice opposed to the moral virtue of religion. It is a vice of excess rather than of defect. Every moral virtue consists in acting according to the medium between two extremes. Any variation that transcends or is in default of this medium vitiates the virtue, gravely or lightly according to the degree of deflection. "The medium of the virtue of religion consists in that it renders to God the reverence and honor due Him as the supreme principle of creation."1 "Every act of superstition transcends this medium, not because it offers more in the divine service than the true religion, but because it offers a divine homage to whom it is not due, or, in an unfitting manner."2 This vice does not render a greater homage

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1 *Summa Theol.*, IIa-IIae, q. 81, a. 3, corp.
and reverence to God than the true religion; but rather dero-
gates from the divine cult by attributing divine homage to a
creature or by ascribing to persons or objects a supernatural
power which God has not bestowed on them.

Superstition is a general term and in its scope embraces all
those vices that deprive God of the reverence and honor due Him
as the supreme principle of creation. Supreme honor and wor-
ship (cultus latriae) is due to the one true God and to Him only.
The worship of a mere creature perverts the order of the divine
Plan. It attributes to him powers that he does not or cannot
possess. "It sets up another god and diminishes the divine sov-
ereignty." This vice is termed idolatry if it renders to a crea-
ture the cult of latria. It is the most grievous form of supersti-
tion and is directly opposed to the worship of the true God.

Idolatry is not the only vice opposed to the virtue of reli-
gion. Any usurpation of the divine power or prerogatives milli-
tates against the worship of God. That man should desire to
know the future is not unusual. He has a natural capacity for
the acquisition of knowledge and a natural curiosity to know the
future. Some future events are discernible to him but others are
hidden from his knowledge. To know the contingent future
pertains to the omniscience of God. This power is not granted
to creatures except by divine commission, as was given to the
Prophets of the Old Dispensation. To investigate the necessary
future is within the province of men. It can be ascertained from
a study of natural causes and of the laws of the physical uni-
verse. An investigation of this kind is in no way opposed to
the worship of the true God. It is this form of investigation
which is employed by the science which concerns itself with the
relative position of the heavenly bodies and from this knowl-
edge is able to determine an eclipse of the sun and moon and
stormy and dry seasons. Events are the effects of their causes.
From a consideration of the causes the effects can be known by
a process of natural reasoning. The investigation, however, of
the contingent and of the free future is not within the natural
power of creatures. These events depend upon the free will of
men which is not determined to one mode of action as are the
laws of nature. "To determine contingent future events before
they occur belongs to God alone Who in His Eternity sees them
as present. If anyone presumes to foreknow or to predict in

8 Ibid., q. 94, a. 3, corp.
any manner whatsoever the contingent future without a divine revelation, he usurps a power belonging to God alone."  

This usurpation of the divine power to know the contingent future is called Divination. Such an action is evil, not because it is prohibited, but rather it is prohibited because it is evil. "Every act of Divination comes from the demons, either because the demons are expressly invoked to manifest the future or because the demons lend themselves in all vain inquisitions of the future so that they may fill the minds of men with vanity."  

Divination or the art of attempting to acquire knowledge of the contingent future employs a great variety of methods. To enumerate and describe all of them would be the work of volumes and far beyond the scope of this article. "Scarcely an object or movement in the heavens, on the earth, or in the water, has escaped being metamorphisized into a message of the future." Multiple as these methods are, Saint Thomas reduces them to three general groups: necromancy, in which the demons are expressly invoked to make known the future; augury, in which the aid of the demons is implicitly invoked and an attempt is made to know the future by observing the signs in nature and interpreting them in relation to human affairs; and sortilege, in which the demon is implicitly invoked and an attempt is made to know the future, not from the signs in nature but from those invented by man, such, for example, as the drawing of lots or the throwing of dice to establish future contingent events.

Saint Thomas admits that some knowledge acquired from the invocation of the demon may be of temporal use to man, but he also adds that "no temporal utility can be compared to the loss of spiritual salvation which threatens by seeking hidden things through the invocation of the demons."  

"It is patent that the invocation of the demon to reveal the future is from its very nature detrimental to man, both on the part of the demon and of man. The demon, inasmuch as he is hostile, intends in all his operations the spiritual ruin of man. Man, precisely because he begs knowledge from the demon, exposes himself at least to belief in him and to act or refrain from action in accordance,
either with the demon’s advice or with his own judgment, de­
pending nevertheless upon the promptings of the demon. Since
these effects of themselves follow from the nature of such an
invocation and imply a willingness on the part of man to believe
the demon, who is very cunning and knows how to lead man to
perdition, even through the medium of truth, they render the
act illicit. Nor is it in the power of man to safeguard himself
from these fallacies.”

When a nation is engaged in warfare, it uses every precau­
tion to conceal its military tactics from the knowledge of its
enemies. Its battlements and strategic points are strongly forti­
fied and diligently guarded. Its military plans are formulated
in secret meetings and dispatched with great secrecy through
trustworthy and confidential messengers. To betray these
secrets is treason; to invite the enemy to take command of
the forts and direct the military manoeuvres is tantamount to
national suicide. We cannot find words sufficiently vehement to
describe and denounce the stupidity and unreasonableness of
such a mode of action. And yet a mode of action essentially
similar to this is reënacted in the Christian’s life when he resorts
to demoniacal invocation. His life is a warfare, “not against
flesh and blood but against principalities and the powers of
darkness.” By betraying himself into the powers of the demon
he forswears his allegiance to God and submits himself to the
avaricious domination of Satan.

9 Cajetan, Commentary on Ila-IIae, q. 95, a. 4.
10 Ephes., vi, 12.