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SECTION D

Thunder on the right

Conservatives blast Reagans' astrology use

By June Straner
FLORIDA TODAY

Brevard's conservative Christian ministers were outraged by this week's news that President and Mrs. Reagan have relied on astrology in planning their daily lives.

The reports surfaced in the just-published book by former White House Chief of Staff Donald Regan, who wrote that First Lady Nancy Reagan utilized astrological predictions to help her husband choose the "right" days to schedule government meetings. Among the astrological determinations: the dates of the Geneva Summit in 1985, the Iceland Summit in 1986, when the president finally spoke of the Iran Contra Affair, and the Washington Summit talks in 1987.

Conservative Christians, longtime and staunch Reagan supporters, feel the use of astrology is at odds with their religious beliefs, beliefs also publicly espoused by the Reagans.

"We have a problem when heads of state take advice from demon powers," said Jamie Buckingham, pastor at Tabernacle Church in Melbourne.

A best-selling Christian author and international Charismatic religious movement leader, Buckingham said he preached two sermons Sunday on the subject. "I am disappointed in the Reagans, but not surprised. Ronald Reagan wrote in his autobiography that he consults his horoscope each morning. He was sworn in as governor of California at precisely 12:10 p.m., the 'best' time on his so-called nativity, or birth, chart."

Buckingham said Reagan is

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not the first leader to use astrology. Calpurnia, wife of Julius Caesar, advised her husband through astrological predictions. And, Mary Todd Lincoln held seances in the White House, the minister said.

"If I could advise Nancy Reagan today, I'd tell her to put down her horoscope and pick up her Bible," Buckingham said. "It is specific in condemning astrologers, diviners, fortune tellers and magicians as false prophets. The whole concept of astrology is that our fate is already sealed, that the good or evil of each planet inhabits our future. It is a curse from Satan."

Astrology is "hocus pocus," said the Rev. Jim Lestwich, a minister at First Baptist Church on Merritt Island. "It is a religion with occultic origin. The Bible is against it. Read Isaiah 47 and Deuteronomy 18," Lestwich said.

The First Lady is a sincere but misguided Christian for dabbling in the pseudo-science of astrology, said Bishop L.T. Weaver, pastor of Melbourne's Greater Faith Temple Church of God in Christ.

There is some truth in astrology, Weaver maintains. "Error contains part-truth. Astrologers and fortune tellers are said to 'bless your hand,' and 'give you luck.' Actually, it's them that gets blessed. You pay for their services. For answers to personal questions and to get real blessings, Christians should pray to the Lord."

Buckingham told his congregation the difference between divination and prophecy is that "prophecy is received from God's Holy Spirit and divination is prying into the future by means of magical arts, superstitions,

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Local conservatives criticize Reagans' use of astrology

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incantations and 'horrorscopes.' "

Guidance comes from one of two places, said Buckingham: "God's pipeline, the Bible, or those writings in the newspaper every morning called horoscopes."

When he was growing up in Vero Beach, Buckingham said, "We went to a restaurant where the place-mats had signs of the Zodiac printed on them. My mother would turn them over, saying they were of the devil.

"My mother knew what she was doing," Buckingham told his church members. "Now, what are we (Christians) going to do when Satan takes our No. 1 hero, President Reagan, and tempts him to find the future by the stars?"

The vice chairman of Central Brevard's Full Gospel Ministers Fellowship answered that question.

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"Most Bible-believing Christians know astrology is deception. The president, if led by it, is in error," said the Rev. Stanley Anderson, pastor of Palm Chapel Assembly of God on Merritt Island. "What is difficult to believe is that President Reagan's wife spoke against pro-lifers when he is outspokenly supportive of them."

(Nancy Reagan is quoted by Regan as saying she didn't "give a damn about pro-lifers.")

Area churchgoers, too, expressed shock over the news generated by Regan's book. Some said they didn't believe the book or felt Regan could have waited to release it at the end of President Reagan's term in office. Others preferred to suffer the news in silence. But, one believer summed up what may have been their questions and thoughts.

"I am a conservative Christian," said Frankie Elwell, a 15-year AT&T telephone operator in the Melbourne office and member of the First Baptist Church of Merritt Island. "I live and vote that way. It bothers me that the First Lady would be devoted to astrology. I've been a Reagan supporter all the way — so far.

"Now I wonder if he is so two-faced he would say good things about the pro-life issue when he and his wife feel so differently?

"And I didn't realize Nancy had so much influence over the President.

"Have we been misled?"