

## THOMAS MERTON DHY PAPER, SEPTEMBER, 2014

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#### BIOGRAPHY

Thomas Merton was a French-American writer, poet, monk, mystic and social critic who inspired and touched many 20<sup>th</sup> century minds and hearts. In 1949, at the age 34, he was ordained to the priesthood and given the name FATHER LOUIS. His most famous book was "SEVEN STOREY MOUNTAIN", his autobiography, published in 1948. He wrote more than 70 books, mostly on spirituality and social justice.

#### EARLY YEARS

He was born in Prades, France on January 31, 1915. His parents were both painters. His mother was an American Quaker. His father was from New Zealand. His parents came to the United States in 1915 to escape WW1. His brother was born 3 years later in New York. His mother died of stomach cancer when he was 6 years old. In 1924 his father was diagnosed with a brain tumor. The prospect of losing his surviving parent filled him with anxiety. In 1926, when Merton was eleven, his father enrolled him in a boys' boarding school in France. This brought up feelings of loneliness and depression for Merton, as he felt deserted by his father, and begged his father to remove him, which he didn't do. As time passed he became more comfortable with his surroundings there.

In 1928 Merton and his father moved to England, and the home of his father's aunt. He went to boarding school in London. His father died when he was 16 years old. At this period in his life he was agnostic and sad. *"I BELIEVE IN NOTHING"* were his words.

In 1933, when he was 18 years old, he visited Rome for the second time. He discovered Byzantine Christian Rome and set about visiting various churches and basilicas. He had a mystical experience in Rome. He felt his father's presence and this led him to see the emptiness he felt in his life, and said that for the first time in his life he prayed, asking God to deliver him from his darkness. While there he visited a Trappist Monastery and thought *"I SHOULD LIKE TO BECOME A TRAPPIST MONK"*.

Also in this year, he attended Cambridge University. His classmates said he became isolated, drank excessively and was called a "womanizer". Most of his biographers agree that he fathered a child with a Cambridge woman, and there was some legal action which was settled discreetly by his guardian. His biography, "SEVEN STOREY MOUNTAIN" was written when he was already a Trappist and it was censored. There was no mention of his sexual indiscretions and fathering a child. There was talk that the mother and the child were killed when London was bombed during the war. Merton agreed to leave Cambridge and return to the United States where he enrolled in Columbia University.

While at Columbia he got his BA in English, then his Masters and PHD. He was editor of his yearbook and art editor of the Columbia Jester. A Hindu monk suggested that he read "Confessions of St. Augustine" and the "Imitation of Christ". He became interested in Catholicism and decided

that he wanted to be a priest.

He first decided to become a Franciscan Monk. After he admitted his past sexual conduct and his drinking history he was told he couldn't become a Franciscan. He then taught English at a Franciscan University. While there-in 1940, he gave up drinking, smoking, stopped going to movies and became more selective in his readings.

In April, 1941, Merton went on a retreat during Holy Week at the Abbey of our Lady of Gethsemane in Kentucky. At once he felt a pull to the place. In December, 1941, he was accepted into the monastery as a postulant at Abbey of Gethsemane. While there, his brother, John Paul, expressed his desire to become a Catholic. He was baptized at a church nearby. He died shortly after as a pilot during the war.

His superiors saw he had a talent for writing and a gifted intellect. He was allowed to continue his writing. He wrote over sixty books and hundreds of poems and articles on topics ranging from monastic spirituality to civil rights, non-violence, and the nuclear arms race. He was ordained a priest in 1946 and took his final vows as a Trappist in 1947.

Merton wrote: *"THE WORLD IS FULL OF GREAT CRIMINALS WITH ENORMOUS POWER, AND THEY ARE IN A DEATH STRUGGLE WITH EACH OTHER. IT IS A HUGE GANG BATTLE, USING WELL-MEANING LAWYERS AND POLICEMEN AND CLERGYMEN AS THEIR FRONT, CONTROLLING PAPERS, MEANS OF COMMUNICATION, AND ENROLLING EVERYBODY IN THEIR ARMIES."*

His vows were shaken to their roots in 1966. He needed

back surgery and while in the hospital he met a nurse half his age and fell dizzily, recklessly in love. Six months later, he confessed to his spiritual director and agonizingly broke off the relationship. To further isolate himself, he moved to a hermitage on the monastery grounds. He retook his monastic vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. He said "We can be flawed and ourselves and still be Holy. For me to be a saint is to be myself".

Merton's personal journal reveals an alive, questioning mind, ceaselessly intrigued by contemporary events and culture. He delighted in literature and arts, but also in jazz. He was often wearied by the church's politics and endless discussions between progressive and orthodox Catholics. Continually questioning, he never took the stance of having all the answers, and he recognized in himself a profound involvement with life and the affairs of the world. (Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine)

In 1968, he was allowed to tour Asia where he met the Dalai Lama on three occasions in Tibet. The Dalai Lama praised him as having a more profound understanding of Buddhism than any other Christian he had known. He visited many Buddhist temples and had a religious experience while viewing statues of Buddha. That same year he attended an interfaith conference in Bangkok, Thailand. It was at this conference that he died. He was accidentally electrocuted after stepping out of his bath and touching an electric fan that was shorted out.

**SOME QUOTES FROM HIS AUTOBIOGRAPHY- "SEVEN STOREY MOUNTAIN"**

*"Around September, 1938, at age 23, the groundwork of conversion was more or less complete, to brings me up from an "atheist"- as I considered myself- to one who accepted all the full range and possibilities of religious experience right up to the highest degree of glory. I not only accepted this intellectually, but now I began to desire it. And not only did I begin to desire it, but I began to do so efficaciously; I began to want to take the necessary means to achieve this union, this peace. I began to desire to dedicate my life to God, to his service." Pg. 223, SSM*

*"I remember how learnedly and enthusiastically I could talk for hours about mysticism and the experimental knowledge of God, and all the while I was stoking the fires of argument with scotch and soda." Pg. 224 SSM*

*"Did I know that my own sins were enough to have destroyed the whole of England and Germany? There has never yet been a bomb invented that is half so powerful as one mortal sin- and yet there is no positive power in sin, only negation, only annihilation: perhaps that is why it is so destructive, it is a nothingness, and where it is , there is nothing left- a blank, a moral vacuum." Pg. 141 SSM*

*"Here I was, 4 years after Oakham (high school). I walked out into the world that I thought I was going to ransack and rob of all its pleasures and satisfactions. I had done what I intended, and now I found that it was I who was emptied and robbed and gutted. What a strange thing! In filling myself, I had emptied myself. In grasping things, I had lost everything. In devouring pleasures and joys, I had found distress and anguish and fear. And now, finally, as a piece of poetic justice, when I was reduced to this extremity of misery and humiliation, I fell into a love affair in which I was at last*

*treated in the way I had treated not a few people in these last years. And it was my defeat that was to be the occasion of my rescue.” Pg. 182 SSM*

## **2. WHERE I PLACE THOMAS MERTON UPON THE PATH**

I hypothesize that Thomas Merton was approaching the SECOND INITIATION.

DEFINITION OF SECOND INITIATION: A disciple, demonstrating consistent spiritual service, but still struggling to control the ego (personality).

His drinking and "womanizing" history in his younger years in addition to falling in love in 1966 and continuing the relationship for 6 months means that he had to struggle to control his emotional body at this time. He wrote on war, social issues, politics, and racism- some 60 volumes in all. So he was continually demonstrating consistent spiritual service.

## **3. RAYOLOGY PROFILE OF THOMAS MERTON**

I HYPOTHESIZE THAT HIS RAYS ARE: **PHYSICAL RAY-  
RAY 3**

**RAY 6**

**RAY 4**

**EMOTIONAL RAY-**

**MENTAL RAY-**

## PERSONALITY

### RAY- RAY 6

## SOUL RAY- RAY

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### A. PHYSICAL ETHERIC RAY

His appearance was said to be stocky, robust and blue-eyed. He was a hard worker. He liked to eat, drink and have sex and many of his earlier years were spent pursuing these pleasures.

### B. EMOTIONAL RAY

Ray 6 emotional people are very reactive, fiery and passionate. They can be fanatical in pursuit of their desires and also very jealous. In advanced people, these traits are transformed into high aspiration and idealism. It's the ray of devotion- the man on this ray is full of religious instincts and impulses, and of intense personal feeling. He will be a writer of religious books, either in poetry or prose.

His quote about "mortal sin" I thought was very 6<sup>th</sup> Ray (that one mortal sin was more powerful than any bomb). He had feelings of loneliness and depression when his father left him at boarding schools in France, England, and then in America. Ray 6 emotional rays find it hard to rise above how they feel about certain people and situations. They react with anger, tears or fretting, and are distinguished by a lack of emotional control. This was true of him in his earlier years.

His biographer wrote that during his long years at Gethsemane, Merton changed from the passionately inward

looking young monk of the SEVEN STOREY MOUNTAIN to a more contemplative writer and poet. Merton became well known for his dialogues with other faiths and his non-violent stand during the race-riots and Vietnam War of the 1960s. I wondered if that Ray 6 emotional body was softening and transitioning to Ray 2 emotional body.

### **C.MENTAL BODY- RAY 4**

I hypothesize that Merton's mental ray was Ray 4. It is the artistic mind, the feeling mind, musical, literary, aesthetic, picture making, poetic, dramatic, and beauty sensitive. It agonizes- backwards and forwards, up and down, exhilaration, then depression. The developed R4 mind conveys facts with great beauty.

He was a writer and a poet. He also loved jazz and when he could leave the monastery, he would catch what live jazz he could- mainly in Louisville.

A Ray 4 mind is vacillating, ambivalent and indecisive. He went from atheist to agnostic to mystic to occultist. One of his earlier quotes "Since I did not believe in anything- anything I might say would only be empty talk"

For 27 years he was a Trappist Monk, a member of one of the strictest of all orders and a resident of a quiet rural monastery. But Merton was also a citizen of the world, passionately engaged in the political dialogues of his day, writing books that were avidly read by millions across the globe, and corresponding by letter with thousands of people.

## **D.PERSONALITY - RAY 6**

**Ray 6** gives to individual the power to persuade, and the ability to arouse and inspire

others. The aggressive form of the 6<sup>th</sup> Ray expression is more combative and zealous in his passion to seek the ideal at any cost. Fields of service of this ray include: activist

(he was a social activist), motivational speaker, religious work, preacher and priest. Thomas Merton was all of these.  
EP11

### **GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE 6<sup>TH</sup>**

**RAY:** Idealistic, emotional intensity, humility, intense devotion toward that which is loved or revered, profound honesty and sincerity, absolutism.

**LOWER 6<sup>TH</sup> RAY:** Short sighted blindness, the power to see no point except one's own, and the suppression of emotions (this may have led to his blow out in later life when he fell helplessly in love). Merton was passionate and dedicated in his desire to serve God and become a monk. In his early days as a Trappist he had narrow views of "the correct religion" and everything was in black or white. With his expansion of consciousness he became **INCLUSIVE** in his idealism instead of **EXCLUSIVE**. **THE HIGHER 6<sup>TH</sup> RAY PERSONALITY** wants peace, not war and can react with tolerance and sympathy to the views of others.EP11

For his social activism, he endured severe

criticism, from Catholics and non-Catholics alike who assailed his political writings as unbecoming a monk. It is said he was difficult to get along with in the monastery. He complained about not getting to go away, privacy and quiet. He had a stormy relationship with his Abbott (superior). Merton said he knew his faults and struggled with pride, frustration and anger. (Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine)

I watched a few videos of him on UTube and I thought he was a great motivational speaker with a sense of humor. On one he was instructing monks how to make 2 towels last for a week instead of one day- very funny, the practical mystic.

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## **E.SOUL RAY - RAY 2**

It was interesting reading as he went from an atheist to an agnostic, to a mystic, and then an occultist in his last years. He had none of the narrow-minded religiosity of his earlier years when everything was Catholic or Non- Catholic. I grew up in this belief system myself.

Some of the characteristics of a Ray 2 Soul:

A glowing suffusion of loving wisdom- a longing for wisdom and truth

A sensitivity to the whole and a renunciation of the great heresy of separateness.

The service of lovingly and wisely teaching others.

Most joyous activity "BEING IN LOVE" This was experienced a few years before his death with the young nurse.

To be in love with ALL- One with ALL. When he had his vision in Louisville and saw all the people as souls and realized that we're all one is my best example.

*"In Louisville in 1958, in the center of a shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all those people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. It was like waking from a dream of separateness, of self-isolation in a special world, the world of renunciation and supposed holiness. This sense of liberation from an illusory difference was such a relief and such a joy to me that I almost laughed out loud. There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun. It was as if I suddenly saw the secret beauty of their hearts, the depths of their heart, where neither sin nor desire nor self-knowledge can reach, the core of their reality, the person that each one is in god's eyes. If only they could see themselves as they really are. If only we could see each other that way all the time.*

(This is from "CONJECTURES OF A GUILTY BYSTANDER" BY THOMAS MERTON.)

His biographer, William Shannon, says that by the

time of this experience in 1958, Merton had become a very different kind of monk than when he entered the monastery in 1941. There was the realization, born of contemplation, that it is not possible to leave the world in any real sense. He writes "*THERE IS SIMPLY NO PLACE TO GO*". This experience challenged the concept of a separate "HOLY" existence lived in a monastery. He was united with, not separated from the rest of the human race.

There are 2 types of Ray 2 Souls - The love aspect or the wisdom aspect. Souls on the wisdom aspect are governed by a developed simplicity in all relations. Simple loving, asking nothing in return, simplicity leads to silence- the silence of an occult retention of speech. I believe Thomas Merton was a ray 2 soul on the wisdom line.

#### **4. ASTROLOGY PROFILE OF THOMAS MERTON**

##### **THE MOON SIGN- LEO**

**The** Moon sign is in Leo, the 5<sup>th</sup> house. Rays 1 and 5 come through Leo. The Exoteric and Esoteric rulers of Leo are the Sun, opposite his Moon in Aquarius in his 11<sup>th</sup> house (he was born during a Full Moon). Esoterically, the Sun (Ray 2) veils Neptune (Rays 6). The Moon is in the 5<sup>th</sup> house with

the focus upon powers of self-expression. Alan Oken says: On a personality level, the Moon in Leo represents the epitome of emotional egocentricity. When the Moon is in this sign, even more advanced personalities still center their deeply passionate feelings (in a personal manner) on those they love. This was true of Thomas Merton and his "falling in Love" episode. Oken then states "The Soul-level purpose of a Moon in Leo is to transform the form life as an expression of self-consciousness into a proper vehicle for group consciousness through individualized effort and talents".

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I think this is a good description of the life he chose in the monastery- to purify himself and to become an instrument of service.

The Moon symbolizes the soul's obstacle. It indicates the instinctual aspects of consciousness that limit the soul's expression. Much of the spiritual journey has to do with transforming the lunar tendencies indicated by the Moon's sign and house. Neptune, the esoterically unveiled ruler of his Leo Moon, has the power to imbue human consciousness with the qualities of compassion and Christ-like love. These qualities Merton demonstrated during his adult life and years of service.

## **SUN SIGN- AQUARIUS**

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The Ray that comes through Aquarius is Ray 5. The personality traits of ray 5 are: critical, analytical mind which leads to watching and criticizing and arguing with self and circumstances. There is mental separation and a desire for knowledge. They have the power to isolate, there is negation of Deity, and distorted views of truth. The Aquarius personality focuses narrowly on its own interests. Merton had negation of Deity, the desire for knowledge and isolation or mental separation. Also the distorted views of truth with his statement "ONE MORTAL SIN IS ENOUGH TO BLOW UP THE WHOLE WORLD".

EXOTERIC RULERS- URANUS - Ray 7, in Aquarius  
conjunct the Sun

ESOTERIC RULER- JUPITER Ray 2, also in Aquarius

## **PERSONALITY TRAITS COMING FROM THE SUN SIGN RULERS**

### **EXOTERIC RULER- URANUS**

**URANUS, exoterically**, emphasizes freedom, shatters crystalized concepts; inventiveness, individuality, creativity. Lower Aquarius theme is "LET DESIRE IN FORM BE RULER". He lives in mental isolation, highly individualistic and fixed minded- Lower Leo power is used for personal comfort, selfish and material gain. Merton's earlier years at Cambridge let his "desires be ruler" with his eating, drinking and womanizing.

URANUS, esoterically, gives lightning flashes of intuition, restructure of personality, allows soul quality to shine through, and new perspectives.

**JUPITER-** Esoteric Ruler, Key phrase "WATER OF LIFE AM I Poured forth for thirsty men". This is the mantram of the WORLD SERVER. Aquarius disciples are universal in outlook, inclusive in spirit and dedicated to the service of humanity, This Thomas Merton demonstrated during his later life in the monastery through all his writings and conferences that he could attend to promote unity.

JUPITER, Ray 2, encourages, brightens, deepens, uplifts, and expands. It gives development of mind, higher education, ethical standards, and religious generosity. Merton pursued his education avidly. He got his PhD and then taught at a Franciscan college before becoming a Trappist.

**PERSONALITY AND SOUL PURPOSE-** Through the incorporation of the energies of the opposite sign Leo, where both his Earth and Moon are, the Aquarian is able to demonstrate profound self-realization while simultaneously working with the context of the collective.

### **SOUL RAY- PISCES - ASCENDANT**

PLANETARY RULERS: JUPITER - 2<sup>nd</sup> RAY, as the Traditional Ruler of Pisces, encourages, brightens, uplifts expands, and deepens. Jupiter also ties the esoteric

expression of Merton's Sun to his Soul Purpose.

NEPTUNE- 6<sup>th</sup> RAY- has the power to imbue human consciousness with Christ-like Love. And just as Jupiter connects his Sun with his Ascendant, so does Neptune, as an expression of the esoteric Heart of the Sun.

SOUL CENTERED RULER: PLUTO - 1<sup>st</sup> RAY this is the Esoteric Ruler of his chart.

PLUTO the "ARROW OF GOD" IS FIRED by the Soul to ensure that snares from the past are destroyed and that obstacles to the expression of divine love are purged. I'd say that by the time he died he was "well purged".

PLUTO EXOTERICALLY- Death, destruction, elimination, transformation of consciousness, transmutes energy. As a young boy he experienced the death of his mother at an early age and feared the same for his father.

PLUTO ESOTERICALLY- It's the agent of death of the personality and destruction of personal will and selfishness, assists with detachment and liberation from the past. We saw many examples of this working out for him.

### **KEYNOTE PHRASES:**

**EXOTERIC- "GO FORTH INTO MATTER"** - It is the call to sacrifice. "Go forth, descend, and make yourself a willing instrument". This Merton did- he made himself a willing instrument and worked at purifying all his vehicles.

**ESOTERIC - "I LEAVE MY FATHERS HOUSE AND TURNING BACK I SAVE"** - The message from the soul who knows it has left Bliss-filled Oneness in order to

serve the Plan and Humanity.

Rays 2 and 6 come through PISCES. I've already suggested that Ray 6 is his emotional Ray and Ray 2 is his Soul Ray, so this fits in nicely.

"The awakening of Pisces to the task of the World Savior and to his particular part with the universality of the One work is the function of the Mutable Cross. The task at hand is the smashing of all crystalized forms of life that inhibit the flow of spiritual reality and loving inclusivity. It is thus that the true 'Soldiers of God' are born, carrying with them the strongest weapons of all, LOVE AND WISDOM." (SSAp248) Merton demonstrated this in his teaching and writings on Renunciation of the "Heresy of Separateness". He was united and ONE with the rest of humanity and he knew it. He died while attending an interfaith conference on Unity in Thailand.

The evolutionary function of Pisces is to transform consciousness from the soul-sensitive disciple into the all-embracing perspective of the World Savior. All is sacrificed in the fulfillment of Divine Will and Purpose. Piscean Initiates are detached from all ties to the material world, and they consecrate their lives to the service of humanity. Merton was working on his Soul Purpose when he died.

The two LOVE Rays work thru Pisces. Ray 2 transforms emotionalism into intuitive Wisdom and Ray 6 fuels adoration for the Divine and a burning desire to serve and save those who suffer. EAp115.

## **SUMMARY**

This journey of Thomas Merton was interesting for me, following his progress from atheist to occultist, from a self-indulged personality to an awakening soul and to an initiate on the path of World Savior. For myself, I learned a lot and the review of the Rays and Astrology is always great. Each time I do it I retain a little bit more.