

The Joys of the Planets

By John Frawley

There is an ancient tradition, known as the *joys* of the planets, which is largely forgotten by even those writers whom we regard as classical authorities. William Lilly, for example, writing in the seventeenth century, mentions the joys, but rarely uses them. This tradition seems to be something he has come across in an old text-book, but has not been able to integrate into his own system, probably because the basis for the tradition had long been forgotten.

The tradition states that each planet is strengthened when accidentally placed in one or other of the houses: the house of its joy. It stems from the idea of planetary sect – the very basic division of the planets into nocturnal or diurnal. The three diurnal planets, Saturn, Jupiter and the Sun, have their joys above the horizon; the nocturnal planets, Mars, Venus and the Moon, joy in houses below the horizon; while Mercury, which can be included in either sect, joys in the Ascendant, on the horizon itself.

I suspect that the joys are related to the exaltations, though I cannot see how. They seem to come from the same tradition of astrology, one which has been partly subsumed and partly swept aside by the dominant tradition which is the one we follow today. In our system, exaltations are regarded as a kind of second-in-command over the signs; but the exaltations are in fact alternative rulers. They come from a completely different system, which, at some point around the time when the earliest astrology books were being written, was grafted onto the main stem, while its roots have been lost – at least to the Western tradition of astrology.

One of the curiosities about the system of planetary joys is that it accords perfectly with the Christian story. This does not, of course, mean either that the system of joys determined the form of Christianity, or that the system was invented by proto-Christians; but as both conform to the innate building structure of the Creation, each will echo the other, in the same way that each individual person and the planets move hand in hand.

As the gentle rain from heaven

The Sun joys in the ninth house, known to the ancients as the house of God, and the Sun is, of course, the symbol of God. The ninth is the house of knowledge, of dreams and visions, of all searching for truth, for God is Truth, and the Sun is its most apparent symbol. It is also the house of long journeys, for all the mundane journeys we may make on Earth are images of the longest journey we make, stretching beyond the boundaries of this world, to God.

The fifth is the house of children, so, as the ninth is the house of God, the fifth from the ninth should show us the Son of God. And indeed it does, for the first house is the joy of Mercury. The son of God is Christ – the World (Mercury) made flesh by appearing in the Ascendant, the house of the body.

Mercury, the image of the perfected man, is the only planet whose glyph contains all three symbols – the cross, the circle and the crescent – fitting for the go-between of the human and the divine. The Ascendant, the eastern horizon, is where this meeting takes place. “Nobody cometh to the Father but by me.” Says Christ: the contact must be made through this point, for this is where the door is.

The fifth house from here, completing the grand trine, is the fifth, where Venus has her joy. The bird of Venus is the dove – the traditional symbol of the Holy Spirit, as can be seen in many churches and religious paintings, especially those of the baptism of Christ, when “the Holy Ghost descended on him in likeness as a dove.” The great feast of the Holy Ghost is Pentecost, which remembers the descent of the Holy Spirit onto the apostles, giving them the ability to speak in tongues so that they could go forth and spread the gospel – to be evangelists (literally ‘messengers’) of the gospel. The fifth is traditionally the house of messengers and ambassadors.

This grand trine of ninth, first and fifth shows the divine energy pouring from God downwards into manifestation. It is made up of the Sun, Mercury and Venus, who are the physical embodiment of the Trinity, the mystery of three in one, as they circle closely around each other as a fixed unit, sometimes merging together, sometimes manifesting themselves separately, but never apart.

After these three, the planets of the Trinity, the next planet out is the Earth – man – and then the three outer planets. Man takes his traditional place at the border of the material and the divine.

The Yearning for God

Opposite the ninth, the joy of the Sun, is the third, the joy of the Moon. This is the seventh from the ninth: God’s wife, as it were. The traditional associations of Mary with the Moon are common in the iconography. When the Moon opposes the Sun as it is when both are in their joy, it is full, filled with grace of God: “Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.” Mary is filled with the light of God, her own will is at one with His: “behold, the handmaid of the Lord.”

From her position in the third, the Moon becomes the base of an upward facing grand trine, imaging mankind’s movement towards God. The second point of this trine is the eleventh house, the joy of Jupiter. The eleventh was known as the house of good fortune. It is the house of joy of life: all the things that make us think someone up there loves us after all, the bounty of the Great Benefic, Jupiter.

The third point of this upward moving trine is the seventh. But no planet has its joy here. It is an empty corner, because, according to Christian teaching, it remains for us to fill it. The seventh is the house opposite the first, which is the house of Christ; so this is the house of the Bride of Christ; the Church, of all of us, which is still being created. The contact between the top point of the divine trine and the root of the mundane trine was made first when God breathed into clay to create Adam, and re-established when God reached down to Mary. We have the possibility of confirming the contact across the trines, by becoming the Bride of Christ and filling our place in the seventh house. But that is up to us.

These two interlocking grand trines give the ‘Star of David’, the symbol of perfect balance between heaven and earth. This is in Hebrew *magen David*, the shield of David; but *magen* is also the Hebrew word for horoscope, and this is held to be the horoscope of King David, who although a sinner, was still the most perfectly balanced of all men. Whether the planets were arranged in this way in his horoscope, I am unsure: I expect they were, and that the malefics too were in their joys.

And in the Blue Corner.....

The malefics have no place in these grand trines. Saturn has its joy in the twelfth and Mars in the sixth, their opposition forming a grand cross with the line from the Sun to the Moon. Here is the devil: *dia-bolos* – literally ‘one who throws himself across’ – in this case, across God’s plan. This is the cross on which Christ and then ourselves are crucified.

Paulus Alexandrinus called the twelfth house ‘evil divinity’. When looking at the twelfth, we are accustomed to use the word self-undoing, which is one of those words used on the assumption that everyone else probably knows what it means. Self-undoing is the true meaning of sin: that is, what we are doing by sinning is undoing ourselves, spoiling our own lives, as is most apparent with Adam and Eve, whose sin cost themselves – and us – a place in Eden.

That is the meaning of this malefic axis: in the twelfth, is sin – our doing wrong and harming ourselves. In the sixth, with Mars, are the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune: all the horrible things that happen to us in life, yet are apparently not our fault, such as work and illness, the traditional concerns of the sixth house. This is in contrast to Jupiter and the eleventh, benevolently providing all the nice things that befall us.

Vettius Valens called the sixth house ‘injuries’ and the twelfth ‘suffering’. According to him, the particular malefic quality of Saturn is ignorance, ignorance of the true nature of necessity, ignorance of the fact that necessity is an illusion. That is it shows our entrapment in the material at the expense of our relationship with the divine. The world Saturn has obvious similarities to the word Satan, yet we usually think of Satan as a very hot figure, radiating fire and brimstone; most un-Saturnine. But in the Divine Comedy is a truly saturnian image of Satan: a huge, shaggy figure, locked in ice at the very depths of Hell.

Satan is the Father of Lies, Saturn has his detriment in Leo and Cancer, the signs of the Sun and Moon, and so can also be taken to be debilitated in their houses, the third and the ninth. These are the two houses of communication: the ninth of communication from above – dreams, visions and the like – the third, of communication on our own level. Saturn also afflicts these houses by casting a square from the twelfth.

Communication may not be one of the more interesting parts of the horoscope: if there were a prize for the most boring house, the third would probably win. In any natal reading, it is usually skated over, for lack of anything remotely interesting to say

about it. But this does not mean that communication is insignificant; rather that we take it for granted. Each of Shakespeare's four great tragedies turns on something that is communicated. A simple statement is made – or, in the case of Lear, not made. In each one, each in its different way, there is something in the communication that leads the hero to destruction. And the hero is each of us. Saturn's blight on communication undermines us all.

The malefic axis also gives us the petitions of the Lord's Prayer. "Lead us not into temptation" concerns the twelfth house; "deliver us from evil", the sixth. "Don't let us ruin ourselves, or 'self-undo' ourselves; and don't let anything nasty happen to us, please." Because these are the two things that pull us away from God: as in any Grand Cross, we see the two squares tugging at the central opposition.

"Lead us not into temptation": keep us out of the muck inside our unconscious to put it in psychological terms, because we can be trapped there forever, reduced to a Frederick West or Ian Brady. "Deliver us from evil," not because it hurts, but because pain makes it difficult to believe. As concentration on the bountiful eleventh house – counting our blessings – leads us to the divine, too much concentration on the house of ill fortune leads us to agree with Stendhal that God's only excuse is that he doesn't exist.

This axis also shows the two curses given mankind on our expulsion from Eden. "In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread": we must work for a living – sixth house. "In sorrow shalt thou bring forth children": In traditional astrology, the house of childbirth is the twelfth.

Consideratio

The word that St Thomas and St Bernard of Clairvaux used for meditation, a specific stage in the life of prayer, was 'consideratio' literally, 'studying the stars'. His is unlikely to have involved their followers in contemplating Russell Grant's daily column; but the choice of word is significant. Studying the stars. Vast and all-embracing, the canopy of stars is the closest we get to the sight of God. "We shall show them our signs upon the horizons and within themselves, until it becomes clear to them that it is the Truth," is said in the Koran. Upon the horizons and within ourselves: there can hardly be a better way to describe astrology. I would suggest that if our consideration, our study of the stars, doesn't lead us to see the divinity beyond the stars, we are not really seeing the stars at all.

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