

The Popes, the Jesuits, and ... Astrology?

by Ed Kohout

A funny thing happened at the Hamilton Museum's Craft Fair. A Journal reader told me how much he really liked the little Kublick/Mars ditty I wrote in the last issue.

"That was really interesting," he said.

So, I guess there is some place for my "space cadet" ramblings in this publication. But, the question is, how far can I push things before I really irritate some people?

I've been told that my overt secular ways might not be the best thing to tout in a community where Christianity is taken very seriously, but history is history, more or less, and sometimes its even more incredible than anyone can imagine. For instance, Catholics!

The Catholics and Astrology

Even though the bible tends to frown upon sorcery and divination, there is no question that the Church engaged in astrology, and almost certainly still does.

The Romans were not much into astrology until the 1st Century AD, when it became somewhat of a fad after being "imported" from lands to the East that the empire had conquered.

It flourished for a few centuries with the upper classes before Constantine, and thereafter, though it saw a long period of neglect during the Dark Ages when the Western empire was in disarray.

In the era of the Crusades, much astrological and astronomical (not easily separated) knowledge was reintroduced via "rediscovered" works of the Classical period.

As the Dark Ages waned, and the Holy Roman Empire gained strongholds throughout Western Europe, astrology gained an academic foothold in the monastic realms, and then in the universities of major population centers, where

it eventually became one of the seven "liberal arts" that every student of the realm had to learn, along with Aristotle, medicine, and other surviving studies.

It wasn't exactly on the tip of everyone's tongue, but we do know that by the time Luther and the Protestants began to challenge the Holy See, Luther himself was casting astrology charts (or, more realistically, having his good friend Melanchthon cast them) proving that the Pope was the Antichrist, and the Papacy was responding with astrology charts that proved Luther was the Antichrist.

While the Papal authorities were not the promulgators of such written works on astrology, we do know that the Venetians had, by that time, developed a huge publishing industry of such radical texts, which found their way well around the European scene, sparking the Renaissance, and the Protestant movements as well.

As we near the 500th anniversary of the spark of the Reformation, which all students know is October 31, 1517, when Luther "nailed" his 95 Theses on the doors of his local church, we might look to where astrology was used by the Catholics to further their own salvos against the Reformation, and that would be with the legendary rise of the Society of Jesus, or the Jesuits.

The Jesuits

The father of the Jesuits is Ignatius Loyola, a Spaniard, who some believe was not quite as purely Christian as we now would assume.

The Jesuits were a society of, among other things, higher education, and eventually the leader of the Jesuit order would be called the "Black Pope," as his stature would come to rival the Papacy's, ruling over a separate ideological bent than the Roman realm.

The current Pope, Francis, is from

the Jesuit order, though the modern day Jesuits are not quite the Jesuits of old.

Without going into too much detail here, the Jesuit order can be divided into two eras - the first, which lasted from the 1530's to the 1770's, and the second, which was revitalized in the early 1800's until the present.

Again, I'm skipping over a lot here, but the historical record tells us that the Papacy in Rome "canonized" the original Jesuit order on September 27, 1540, via a Papal Bull.

Those original Jesuits were astute students of the planets and heavens, and thus calendars. They were so proficient that they were procured by the Chinese to perfect their own Imperial calendar, and later instructed Pope Gregory on how to "reform" the Roman "Julian" calendar, effective in 1582.

(The original Julian calendar had a "leap day" every four years, but the Gregorian reform used a cycle of 97 leap days inserted every 400 years, which more accurately accounted for the solar year which is actually 365.2422 days, rather than 365.25 days. Yes, these things do matter, as the Julian calendar was "jittering" out of sync with the celestial reality, to the tune of about 10 days over 1500 years. This was important because the timing of Easter depended on a precise measurement of the Spring Equinox, and being ten days off by the 16th Century was unacceptable.)

Back to 1540, it was then that the Holy See decided to give the Jesuits the force of law, and the date that was picked was September 27, 1540.

This date is astrologically significant, as the two outer planets aligned perfectly with the two most important stars in Christian astronomy: Regulus, the "King Star," denoting the birth of Jesus, and Spica, the "Virgin's Spike of Wheat," denoting, of course, the Blessed Virgin Mother that we call Mary.

(Yes, the "virgin" and "Virgo" are synonymous in what was then still the mysterious heavenly realm of lights that shine at night.)

A modern depiction of this chart is shown on the opposite page, drawn for the moment the Sun is at the highest point in the sky over Rome. On it, we can see:

Jupiter = 23°28' Leo
Regulus = 23°26' Leo
Saturn = 17°17' Virgo
Spica = 17°25' Virgo

Remembering that, in 1540, Uranus, Neptune, Pluto, the asteroids, and everything else that wasn't visible to the naked eye was not known, so having the two outermost planets (they did know that Jupiter and Saturn were furthest from Earth, which at that time was at the center of the cosmos) align with these two stars would have been considered quite important, at least for anyone who was paying attention, and the Jesuits certainly were.

In fact, at no other time before, or since, have those two planets and those two stars been so closely aligned as this particular day.

Not too shabby, eh?

Washington DC

As the 18th Century droned on, the Jesuits became somewhat of a pariah for the Papacy, having engaged in this and that outrageous behavior.

However, the Jesuits did find a refuge of sorts in the New World, more specifically in Baltimore, which was probably the only cogent Catholic island in the sea of American Protestantism.

The American Jesuits decided to set up a university in the hinterlands of Maryland (Mary, get it?), in what would become Georgetown. "Maryland" is named for the Virgin Mother, as it was indeed founded by three Jesuits who set sail in 1633, from England, to the New World. They



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