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Suzanne Zuercher. *Merton: An Enneagram Profile*. Notre Dame, Ind.: Ave Maria Press, 1996. 215 pages. \$9.95.

Review by John P. Mossi, S.J.

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*Merton: An Enneagram Profile* examines the family structure, complex personality, and diverse writings of Thomas Merton from the perspective of the enneagram. In essence, the book presents the author's interpretation of Merton's primary motivations which led him to embrace monastic life and which remained as the developing force in his personality.

Suzanne Zuercher, O.S.B., President of Saint Scholastica Academy in Chicago, has previously authored two books: *Enneagram Spirituality* and *Enneagram Companions*. Zuercher's interest in the enneagram serves as the dominate framework for her analysis of Merton. This book is divided into five major sections: "The Enneagram, the Spiritual Journey, and Thomas Merton," "Instinct, Compulsion, and Gift: Vice and Virtue in the Life of Thomas Merton," "The Spiritual Geography of Thomas Merton," "Relationship Brings Meaning: The People in Merton's Life," and "Merton's Spiritual Message." These classifications provide the rationale for predicating of Merton one of the nine enneagram personalities.

In fairness to the reader, who will invest time and money in this book, a few assumptions need to be clarified. First, while the enneagram is a popular topic for workshops and self-help manuals, its typology, which is attributed to the Islamic mystical sect of the Sufis, is not recognized by professional psychology associations nor can its theories be propounded with certainty by any measurable criteria, be they cognitive or behavioral. At best, the enneagram is a parapsychological tool whose value is under scrutiny by the academy. Second, in order to engage this book in a critical fashion, the reader will have to be well versed in the enneagram framework, since Zuercher's text presumes familiarity with it. If the reader does not possess such understanding, the blueprint of Zuercher's book will not be helpful in assisting a reader in arriving at the author's conclusions. Lastly, since the book's principal focus is to provide an enneagram profile for Merton's personality, it would seem to me that the dedicated reader would need to possess a lively curiosity to explore this rather arcane topic.

As a reviewer, I harbor serious reservations concerning the research method and conclusions of *Merton: an Enneagram Profile*. My major objection is that the methodology provides an interpretation of Merton's life and writings rather than a disciplined inquiry. The chapters begin with gratuitous descriptions of characteristics or traits attributed to the *artistic* type, which according to the enneagram's numerical structure is referred to as a *Number Four*. In essence, the *Four* is postulated of the creative artist, who as inspired, highly intuitive and poetic, manifests depressive tendencies and feels exempt from living as others do. From inchoate samples of Merton's writings, which are often uncontextualized and inadequately analyzed, the author "discerns" that Merton most likely was a *Four*. Throughout this text, it seems that the author's enthusiasm for the enneagram overrides an intelligent dialogue with Merton's writings.

Chapter Seven, entitled "Life as Drama," which features excerpts from *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, serves as one of many examples of personality theory which is invoked to serve as a justification for the interpretation of Merton's thought. Zuercher sees Merton as a "character who is on stage in this scene [as] the suffering, misunderstood martyr." An examination of the quote from *Conjectures* yields that it has nothing to do with drama, theater, suffering or martyrdom. Instead it clearly addresses the topic of rigorous, truthful self-examination (74). Assertions, in this chapter and elsewhere, are freely made and inadequately analyzed. Throughout, it is assumed that the validity of the author's assumptions are to be uncritically accepted by the reader.

In Chapter Two, entitled "The Fundamental Sin: A Figure on His Own," Zuercher attempts to diagnose a family portrait which features Merton as a little boy. The author writes:

Children not only make choices about how they will live their lives, they do so from their characteristic instinct or gesture or stance. Were Tom Merton not a 4, he would have judged reality and behaved other than he did.

In the photo of the four-year old Tom we see captured on camera one moment when he learned about living. This and similar learnings shaped his articulation of issues in the spiritual journey. The picture itself may have been a significant moment in his memory. Surely, at least it made concrete the gesture that characterized Merton's future living and writing.

From the interpretation of this one photograph, the reader is asked to accept the conclusion that the *Four* personality type was already ineluctably established in Merton as a youngster.

In a word, I found *Merton, An Enneagram Profile* to be a tedious and confusing work. It is freighted with assumptions and implausible interpretations. The writing is repetitious, lacks critical development, and so, provides a simplistic and dubious portrait of Thomas Merton.

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