

2. Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 1961) 122.
3. *The Joy of the Gospel* (Evangelii Gaudium) (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2013); subsequent references will be cited as “*Evangelii Gaudium*” parenthetically in the text.
4. See Thomas Merton, *The Rule of Saint Benedict: Initiation into the Monastic Tradition* 4, ed. Patrick F. O’Connell (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications, 2009) 223-25; Thomas Merton, *Monastic Observances: Initiation into the Monastic Tradition* 5, ed. Patrick F. O’Connell (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications, 2010) 149-55, 166-83; William H. Shannon, “*Lectio Divina*,” in William H. Shannon, Christine M. Bochen and Patrick F. O’Connell, *The Thomas Merton Encyclopedia* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002) 253-54; Mary Murray McDonald, “The Soul-Rich Monk/Priest: Thomas Merton on *Lectio Divina*,” *The Merton Annual* 25 (2012) 197-204.
5. Thomas Merton, *The Asian Journal*, ed. Naomi Burton Stone, Brother Patrick Hart and James Laughlin (New York: New Directions, 1973) 335.
6. Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio to his priests in Argentina in 2012 (*New York Daily News*, March 14, 2013).

Why Merton Matters to This Non-Catholic

By Hans Stefan Gustafson

As a non-Catholic undergraduate at Boston College over a decade ago, I first encountered Thomas Merton. I have remained non-Catholic, but when I reflect on all of the times I considered entering into the Roman Catholic Church I can trace the primary inspiration to do so back to Merton (as I am sure many have done). I suppose that if I ever do decide to become a Catholic, Merton will have played perhaps one of the largest roles in that decision. In my early college days I read *The Seven Storey Mountain* and some of his other popular texts (e.g., *Seeds of Contemplation*). In *Seven Storey*, I found kinship with Merton as I confronted the common questions, struggles, tensions and pulls of a young man in America. He gave me a license to wrestle with the shortcomings of humanity and religion without abandoning it, a powerful and necessary lesson for many people.

Back in my college days, I recall a Catholic professor of philosophy saying something along the lines that “Merton is good. But only his early stuff, not the later stuff” – the suggestion here being, I suppose, that his later works, which dabbled in interreligious discourse, intermonastic spirituality and social justice issues, were somehow too progressive and possibly “heretical.” Of course, I quickly procured Merton’s later works and devoured them and soon discovered that they were truly his best works, especially his journals. After reading his *Asian Journal* twice, I ended up studying in Kathmandu, Nepal for a semester and then upon graduation moved to Southeast Alaska (as a non-Catholic in the Jesuit Volunteer Corps) to live in a place Merton considered special. In fact, my fascination with his later years and his quest for place prompted me to publish an article in *The Merton Annual* entitled, “Place, Spiritual Anthropology and Sacramentality in Merton’s Later Years.”¹

Without question, one of the greatest impacts Merton has made on my

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thought, and that of countless others, is his commitment to constructive interreligious encounter. In an era of religious diversity and plurality, the need for voices crying out for this from all religious traditions is great. Merton modeled a way of encounter that has come to be widely accepted by those working in the area of interreligious and interfaith encounter. This is the idea of remaining rooted in one's own tradition (which Merton most certainly was) while continually making the effort energetically and actively to engage others outside your own tradition. Further, he provides a simple way of fostering interfaith friendship and the deepening of one's own Catholic practice. This does not call for the refutation of every form of Protestantism, Hinduism, Islam, and so on, but rather is a call to find and affirm the truth one finds within those traditions. This simple starting point, which can be crucial, encourages us to begin with affirming everything we can in other traditions, because if we reject everything in all other religions, then we will not have much to affirm in our own tradition.² In this manner, interfaith dialogue can commence with affirmation.

Merton's influence continues to reverberate in my life today. I remain a Protestant Christian, but I am currently the associate director of the Jay Phillips Center for Interfaith Learning, an academic center located at two Catholic universities in Minnesota (University of St. Thomas and Saint John's University). I continue to have a deep appreciation for the Catholic tradition, and especially its diverse expressions of spirituality. I also teach courses on world religions and interreligious dialogue at these institutions. Merton has taught me to remain rooted in my tradition (as I continually explore the religious and spiritual roots of my ancestors), yet always striving to engage and learn from the rich religious traditions of the world. I can confidently say that Merton has influenced my scholarly and spiritual thought in a more holistic manner than almost all other thinkers I have encountered. His spirit and influence continue to reverberate and resonate in my life and in so doing, I remain humbly hopeful that I am able to do justice to his life as I strive to introduce him to the young people I work with.

1. Hans Gustafson, "Place, Spiritual Anthropology and Sacramentality in Merton's Later Years." *The Merton Annual* 25 (2013) 74-90.
2. See Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966) 128-29.

A Seer Interprets the Ministry of the Stars

By Gary Hall



Gary Hall

Because we live in a womb of collective illusion, our freedom remains abortive. Our capacities for joy, peace, and truth are never liberated.¹

Gary Hall teaches Practical Theology at The Queen's Foundation, Birmingham, UK, where Merton's influence is felt in the formation of Anglican and Methodist ministers. He has been editor of *The Merton Journal* and writes and speaks on Merton regularly for conferences, retreats, journals courses and study days.