between people of faith and those who do not claim to have spiritual roots? These questions, and undoubtedly others, could form the basis for lively conversation among activists today.

To commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the retreat, a meeting was held at Bellarmine University in 2014 with three remaining original participants and others currently involved and interested in the ongoing work for peace and justice. As with the 1964 meeting, this event focused upon the spiritual underpinnings of social action by raising again the question that Merton posed to the original group: by what right do we protest? The question requires one to focus upon the importance of the prophetic nature of resistance: that the spiritual roots for Christians, at least, demand that our resistance be loving and non-violent. Engaging in protest with a more socially and religiously diverse world community may bring new challenges and opportunities. In any case, the meeting at Bellarmine indicates that the retreat with Merton in 1964 is a significant reference point for social activists and a springboard for continuing dialogue.

Oyer's book reminds us in a new way of the importance of spiritual roots when protesting social injustice. For those who wish to protest without carefully examining their own motives or goals, the retreat serves as a reminder that the spiritual or moral roots of one's protest should be examined. Would the witness of contemporary activists be more faithful and prophetic if people who envision a better world paused to examine their right to protest and their motives? And, would more people of faith, after examining their spiritual roots, take up the cross of protest and stand with the disenfranchised, the suffering and those in despair? Oyer invites us to participate in the conversations that took place at Gethsemani with Merton. More importantly, his inquiry into this historic event has resulted in a text that encourages similar discussions as a foundation for the current witness to peace and justice.

Deborah Belcastro

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Gordon Oyer gives a "who, what, when and why" of the November 17-19, 1964 retreat that anticipated and in some ways catapulted many of its participants into active resistance to growing United States military engagement in Southeast Asia. Oyer blends what might appear as disconnected, Thomas Merton's withdrawal to his hermitage for greater silence, solitude and stillness, and his resolve to write on social issues despite a ban on publication of *Peace in the Post-Christian Era*.[1]

Meticulously researched and well-written, the book's concluding chapter seven identifies "Impressions that Remained" for our generation, twice-removed, seeking to strengthen core values, become self-aware and part ways from social norms. Among "lingering themes" (203-207) of the Gethsemani Abbey retreat, Oyer identifies several legacies. Some offer deep insight into the challenges for peace activists of our day, as they did in the 1960s.

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[1] Thomas Merton, *Peace in the Post-Christian Era*, ed. Patricia A. Burton (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004).

A key issue for Merton was his insistence on the importance of nurturing contemplation as a personal resource in protest. An example is his February 21, 1966 letter to James Forest, one of the retreat participants and a member of a fledgling Catholic Peace Fellowship affiliate of the Fellowship of Reconciliation:

> do not depend on the hope of results. . . . [T]hese are not in your hands or mine, but they can suddenly happen, and we can share in them: but there is no point in building our lives on this personal satisfaction, which may be denied us and which after all is not that important. So the next step in the process is for you to see that your own thinking about what you are doing is crucially important. You are probably striving to build yourself an identity in your work and your witness. You are using it so to speak to protect yourself against nothingness, annihilation. That is not the right use of your work. All the good that you will do will come not from you but from the fact that you have allowed yourself, in the obedience of faith, to be used by God's love. Think of this more and gradually you will be free from the need to prove yourself, and you can be more open to the power that will work through you without your knowing it. The great thing after all is to live, not to pour out your life in the service of a myth: and we turn the best things into myths. If you can get free from the domination of causes and just serve Christ's truth, you will be able to do more and will be less crushed by the inevitable disappointments.[2]

This theme during retreat conversations did not end there. One of Merton's myriad friendships by correspondence was with Amiya Chakravarty, whom Merton met in India and to whom Merton dedicated his book *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*.[3] The Bengali poet believed that "to be peaceful one has to be spiritually rooted, and practice the law of divine love."[4]

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[2] Thomas Merton, *The Hidden Ground of Love: Letters on Religious Experience and Social Concerns*, ed. William H. Shannon (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1985) 294, 296-97 [February 21, 1966 letter to Jim Forest].

[3] Thomas Merton, *Zen and the Birds of Appetite* (New York: New Directions, 1968).

[4] Amiya Chakravarty, *The Indian Testimony*, Pendle Hill Pamphlet 72 (Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Publications, 1953) 15.

The theme recurs on May 28, 1966, when exiled Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh visited Gethsemani with John Heidbrink of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. Merton wrote of the spiritual bond the two monks established: "Nhat Hanh is a free man who has acted as a free man in favor of his brothers . . . moved by the spiritual dynamic of a tradition of religious compassion."[5]

In another context, reflecting the retreat theme on the spiritual roots of protest, Nhat Hanh wrote:

> I hope we can bring a new dimension to the peace movement. The peace movement is filled with anger and hatred. It cannot fulfill the path we expect from them. A fresh way of being peace, of doing peace is needed. That is why it is so important for us to practice meditation, to acquire the capacity to look, to see, and to understand. It would be wonderful if we could bring to the peace movement our contribution, our way of looking at things, that will diminish aggression and hatred. Peace work means, first of all, being peace. Meditation is meditation for all of us. We rely on each other. Our children are relying on us in order for them to have a future.[6]

Merton sought "the true way of unity and peace, without succumbing to the illusion of withdrawal into a realm of abstraction from which unpleasant realities are simply excluded by the force of will."[7] He called for a deep engagement in the spiritual and liturgical life of Christ as an antidote to an explosion of "violence, hatred and indeed . . . a kind of insane and cunning fury which threatens our very existence" (*FV* 224).

For Merton, living a faithful life required that one ground oneself in the messianic lifestyle of Jesus, and a desire to become a living sign of God's presence. In his disordered world, he discerned that many persons endlessly accumulate rubbish and new satisfactions. He counseled vigilance in the face of "the sham, the unreality, the alienation, the forced systematization of life," and realism about all of human condition that is alienated and suppressed.[8]

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[5] "Nhat Hanh Is My Brother," in Thomas Merton, *Faith and Violence: Christian Teaching and Christian Practice* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968) 107; subsequent references will be cited as "*FV*" parenthetically in the text (Merton dedicated this book to conference participants Phil Berrigan and Jim Forest; Heidbrink had helped organize the retreat but had been unable to attend.) See also Robert H. King, *Thomas Merton and Thich Nhat Hanh: Engaged Spirituality in an Age of Globalization* (New York: Continuum, 2001).

[6] Thich Nhat Hanh, *Being Peace*, ed. Arnold Kotler (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1987) 80.

[7] "The Contemplative Life in the Modern World" (*FV* 221).

[8] Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday,

Merton warned against an "idolatrous cult of technology and power, and the senseless magnification of man's greatness," advising, "let us 'turn to the world' in the sense of regaining command over our vast powers and using them to fulfill man's needs" (*CGB* 203). He encouraged people to live in the knowledge that God loves each and every person irrespective of her or his merits. Merton understood that what is good in a person comes from God's love, not from their doings, nor from that which is external to one's true self.

Merton and his fellow retreatants continue to offer spiritual direction to all who struggle with the role of technology in society. They were prescient given the tsunami of concern, fifty years later, that mobile phones and other technological gizmos have become an "addiction" and source of death. Pulitzer Prize-winning author Geraldine Brooks characterizes these in comments on John Freeman's *The Tyranny of E-mail*: "I'm feeling the same way about my laptop. . . . [T]his so-called boon to communication and productivity has become a distracting, privacy-sapping, alienating, addicting time-suck. He has convinced me that the new mantra for our times ought to be Tune out, Turn off, Unplug."[9]

A specific legacy of the Gethsemani retreat is Merton's reminder that the search to live more humanly requires grounding in prayer. Reading Oyer's fine book, I recalled having discovered Merton's writings in a course on modern Catholicism that I took at Colgate Rochester Divinity School in 1967. This led me to undertake a monastic retreat, repeated virtually every year since.

I have met several of the retreatants, including Philip Berrigan whose role I played in a production of Dan Berrigan's *The Trial of the Catonsville Nine*.[10] To raise funds for our defense after an action involving civil disobedience in relation to the draft and Vietnam War, a group of us, the Flower City (Rochester) Conspiracy, performed the play in several upstate New York communities. Deepening my commitment to the spiritual roots of protest, I was privileged to help host Thich Nhat Hahn's visit to Memphis, Tennessee for a peace walk in 2002. We sought to counter growing rhetoric about "war on terrorism" in the Middle East. Nhat Hahn urged that practicing peace means being peace in everyday aspects of living such as walking and eating.[11]

1966) 234; subsequent references will be cited as "*CGB*" parenthetically in the text.

[9] http://books.simonandschuster.ca/The-Tyranny-of-E-mail/John-Freeman/9781416576747; see John Freeman, *The Tyranny of E-mail: The Four-Thousand-Year Journey to Your Inbox* (New York: Scribner, 2009).

[10] Daniel Berrigan, *The Trial of the Catonsville Nine* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970).

[11] http://www.buddhachannel.tv/portail/spip.php?article3576. Peacewalk 2002 led to

Merton's call for living in obedience to God, Source and Giver of life, infused a spiritual dimension to the civil rights, ecumenical and peace movements of his day, as well as ours. We face challenges perhaps more threatening than those faced by the fourteen retreatants. Rebecca Tarbotton, Executive Director of the Rainforest Action Network (1973-2012) observes, "We need to remember that the work of our time is bigger than climate change. We need to be setting our sights higher and deeper. What we're really talking about, if we're honest with ourselves, is transforming everything about the way we live on this planet."[12]

At the start of the retreat, Merton called for "*metanoia*, total personal renewal" (245) rooted in a deep spirituality. This endures as a source of hope and stimulus for constructive, nonviolent responses to the challenges of today. With Merton and his friends on retreat, we embrace that "Creative Force who bids reverence for mysteries that sustain all of life" (231).

Paul R. Dekar

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Gordon Oyer didn't intend to write a book. His reading of fellow Mennonite John Howard Yoder's peace literature, however, led him to the peace writings of Thomas Merton and a Merton biography. He became intrigued by the reference to a gathering of fourteen peace activists held in 1964 at Gethsemani at which Yoder himself was a participant. Curiosity led Oyer to start intensive research, which eventually culminated in his meticulously documented book *Pursuing the Spiritual Roots of Protest*. Using the resources of journals, notes from participants, the archives of several universities (most importantly the Bellarmine Thomas Merton Center), and personal interviews, Oyer has compiled a remarkably detailed account of this significant retreat, which proved to be an energizing and enduring stimulus for the ecumenical group as well as a fruitful exchange of reflections on social protest.

The gathering itself had been in the works for almost two years, spearheaded, interestingly, by laymen John Heidbrink of the Fellowship of Reconciliation and Paul Peachey of the Church Peace Mission. Presenters at this two-and-a-half-day conference were: Merton himself, who gave the first talk; Dan Berrigan, Merton's friend and confidant; A. J. Muste, the eldest guest and the one with the most prominent pacifist credentials; and

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creation of Magnolia Grove Monastery in Batesville, Mississippi, a community center for mindfulness in the tradition of Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh (http://magnoliagrovemonastery.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=71&Itemid=56).

[12] Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014) vii.