

thinking rather than texts that agreed with Merton's developing thought. This dissonance, however, does not diminish Arcement's work. Instead, it adds another layer that people interested in Merton might find appealing.

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DEAR, John, *Thomas Merton, Peacemaker: Meditations on Merton, Peacemaking, and the Spiritual Life* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015), pp. xv + 191. ISBN 978-1-62698-107-2 (paper) \$20.00.

Thomas Merton's assertion that "The God of peace is never glorified by human violence," penned over sixty years ago in *No Man Is an Island*,¹ expresses a core assumption woven throughout this collection of twenty-seven meditations. The author, peace activist Fr. John Dear, also offers a corollary that equally anchors his reflections: "The God of peace is always glorified by human nonviolence" (xi). Indeed, Dear's meditations repeatedly name God as "the God of peace" and nonviolence as humanity's calling.

Dear includes Merton among a host of prophetic advocates who formed his own peacemaking vocation, one whose "writings and example have been a steady, daily source of strength, hope, and light, right up to today" (x). In tribute to this influence, Dear composed these "musings and meditations based on Merton's life and writings . . . [as] simple, free-flowing commentaries" (xiv) on a life of peace advocacy. They illuminate, therefore, how Merton's work has helped motivate and inspire one of today's most passionate and vocal spokespersons for ending war and the militarization of our world.

Since Dear presumes readers are already familiar with Merton (xiii), this is not primarily a resource to explore specifics about Merton, although he does summarize aspects of Merton's life and abundantly quotes Merton throughout. Rather, Dear mainly intends this volume to inspire and edify the reader's pilgrimage of "active nonviolence" and discovery of "the underlying communion that already exists among us" (xii). He focuses his meditations around such questions as, "What is the connection between the spiritual life of peace and nonviolence, and the social, economic, and political realities of war and violence?" and "How can we move out of the culture of war and violence and step deeper into the spiritual life of nonviolence?" For one thing, Dear responds, "We try to cultivate peace within us, that we might radiate peace around us" (xii), and his meditations explore how Thomas Merton can help us accomplish that.

Dear wrote these reflections in two blocks, about half penned during

1. Thomas Merton, *No Man Is an Island* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1955) 197.

a winter at his New Mexico hermitage and the other half while in rural southern France, a region where Merton spent several childhood years. In Dear's own words, these musings "are not presented systematically" (xiv); they do not follow a particular chronology of Merton's writings, nor are they thematically grouped. The reader encounters each as a unique and mostly self-contained reflection with minimal cross-reference to others. Given Dear's activist history, it does not surprise that many chapters focus heavily on implications for war, weaponry and human military aggression. But throughout, he also gives significant nods to how "non-violence" challenges "injustice," "poverty," "racial prejudice," "climate catastrophe," etc. And – unavoidable when drawing upon Merton – Dear speaks as well to our need for interior cleansing of violent thought and intent when following the path of peacemaking.

The volume's open structure means that responses to a particular meditation will likely vary depending on the posture, needs and frame of mind each reader brings to them. I experienced this personally, as some meditations spoke to me differently during my second reading than during the first. A couple meditations struck me for their illumination of Merton's talent for bringing concepts often relegated to "otherworldly" realms down to Earth here and now. "Blessed Are the Nonviolent" (40-49), for example, accomplishes this regarding eschatology, the study of "end times." Here Dear reflects on Merton's 1966 essay, "Blessed Are the Meek: The Christian Roots of Non-Violence,"² adding passages from Merton's journals and a couple other published writings. To confront a "bad theology" that relegates Christ's teachings to a future epoch, Dear invokes Merton's comment that nonviolence has an "eschatological quality" which unites "the power of human poverty" with "the invisible strength of Christ." For Merton, this power is active now; it expresses "a profound existential understanding" that "the Kingdom has been established" (44). A Merton journal entry on "realized eschatology" asserts "the transformation of life and human relations by Christ *now* (rather than an eschatology focused on future cosmic and religious events)" (45). The Holy Spirit, repentance, seeing Christ in humanity, and the sacraments all gain immanent relevance, Merton suggests, through "a Christian peacemaking mission . . . the preaching of the gospel of unity, nonviolence, and mercy" (45). For Dear, Merton's "biblical insights into an eschatological understanding of the times we live in . . . [help] us to carry on the work of peace and the way of nonviolence, knowing that we are fulfilling God's work in . . . salvation history" (47).

2. Thomas Merton, *Faith and Violence: Christian Teaching and Christian Practice* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968) 14-29.

Dear's meditation "Alleluia, Christ is Risen" (166-73) similarly expands the concept of "resurrection," drawing from Merton's 1967 sermon, *He Is Risen*.³ Here Merton suggests we are risen with Christ now in this life, not simply into some future life:

The Christian who is risen in Christ must dare to be like Christ . . . to follow conscience even in unpopular causes . . . to disagree with the majority . . . even when others do not understand why he is acting this way. . . . [This is] not because he is arrogant, but because he has humility to stand alone and pay attention to the purpose and the grace of God, which are often quite contrary to the purposes and the plans of an established human power structure. . . . [W]e must dare to stand by [Christ] . . . when the entire establishment both religious and civil turned against him as a modern state would turn against a dangerous radical. (171)

These words encourage Dear to "go forward in our work for peace and justice, first of all, because Jesus is risen and alive. . . . We have risen with Christ, therefore we carry on Christ's work and speak out against war and injustice with him, come what may" (171).

Dear's meditations also engage many other facets of Merton's thought: contemplation, silence, solitude, communion and unity with all, spiritual conversation/friendship with fellow travelers. "Not Survival, but Prophecy" (93-99) expands Merton's description of the monk's modern, prophetic vocation to include the individual Christian and the Church as a whole. For Dear, "We are not only a pastoral people, we are a prophetic people" (95). Dear's final few reflections crescendo in strength, offering insight into the feminine Sophia, our identity as "part of the universe" (147), unity and communion with humanity, and resurrection. They include my personal favorite: "The Universe Is My Home" (138-48), which highlights Merton's prescient awareness of humanity's desperate need to reconfigure our identity into one "purely and simply *part of nature*" (143) and in "unity with all living things" (147) – i.e., to transcend our species' arrogant drive to dominate over rather than integrate with the universe into which we are created.

Dear also helps expose the perpetual contemplation/action, faith/practice tension with which many of us grapple. Some would prioritize contemplation, believing it inevitably leads one, as Dear puts it, "to commune with the living God of peace and live in nonviolent communion with all humanity and all creation" (6). Yet he also acknowledges a potential for "contemplative violence" (11), sharing an anecdote of nuns who shouted

3. Thomas Merton, *He Is Risen* (Niles, IL: Argus, 1975).

down Daniel Berrigan's criticism of the Vietnam War (11), and his own encounter with monks who declined to vow nonviolence as the first war on Iraq approached (12). Contemplative experience and nonviolence, it seems, invite simultaneous embrace in a dance of mutual reinforcement, rather than one leading directly to the other.

A strength of this book lies in bringing together diverse and extended Merton quotations – particularly those hidden in letters and journal entries – that illuminate the depth and breadth of his commitments to nonviolence. It also serves as a fine example of how sitting with Merton can elicit diverse and inspiring meditations if one has the patience and commitment to listen and learn from him, as Dear has. The author's injection of personal experiences and anecdotes of those who knew Merton add color and insight, as well.

As a series of reflections and commentary on Merton, though, distinctions between what primarily reflects Merton's thought, what reflects Dear's thought, and what reflects both sometimes blur. Specialists might quibble over certain historical or theological details noted about Merton and his spiritual pilgrimage. As Dear himself comments, his persistent and passionate mantra to cease war and violence may feel repetitive at times (see 79). But such distractions aside, *Thomas Merton, Peacemaker* offers a helpful collection of meditations that encourages and inspires us both to learn from Thomas Merton and to live out Christ's mission of reconciliation.

Gordon Oyer

COADY, Mary Frances, *Merton & Waugh: A Monk, A Crusty Old Man & The Seven Storey Mountain* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2015), pp. 155. ISBN: 978-1-61261-628-5 (cloth) \$22.

This is an engaging and attractive little book which is beautifully produced by Paraclete Press. Its focus is the surviving correspondence between Thomas Merton and Evelyn Waugh that took place between August 1948 and February 1952. This consists of 20 letters: thirteen from Merton and seven from Waugh. Unfortunately, as author/editor Mary Frances Coady explains, the Waugh Estate allowed no more than two-thirds of each letter from Waugh to Merton to be printed, although she advises how some of these letters can be read in their entirety on the relevant website.

The useful introduction explains how Waugh, an eminent English Catholic writer, received the manuscript of Merton's *The Seven Storey Mountain* with a request for an endorsement in the summer of 1948. By that time Waugh was famous in America for his novel *Brideshead Revis-*