

for the unanticipated consequences of her personal efforts to put the love commandment into practice in the circumstances of her own life. When New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan, considerably more conservative than Pycior, was invited to give the commencement address at her college in 2012, she wrote him a letter drawing on her ongoing research to suggest that he speak to the graduates not on various contested issues in church and society, but on love, Merton's "hidden ground of love" and Day's declaration at the conclusion of her autobiography that "The final word is love" (xvii). The cardinal followed her advice, invoking the pair in his address as "Two real giants when it comes to love" and seeing in the young people before him "today's Thomas Mertons and Dorothy Days" (xix).

But the story doesn't end there. When the 2015 visit of Pope Francis to the United States was being planned, responding to a request for suggestions for the pope's address to the joint session of Congress, Cardinal Dolan, at the time the president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, proposed that the witness of Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton be highlighted (see xv). Like the cardinal himself in 2012, the pope responded positively to this proposal, and the pair joined Lincoln and King as examples of "great Americans" representing enduring Christian and authentically human values and actions. Thus did the author's labor of love, her reaching out in a gesture of active, loving engagement to someone with whom she disagreed on many issues, result in a graced moment that touched the minds and hearts of millions, a concrete sign that obedience to the greatest commandment is fundamentally sacramental, serving as a sign and instrument through which God's own love can shine forth in creatures, as it did in the two figures whose complex, mutually supportive friendship is so powerfully recounted here.

Patrick F. O'Connell

FOREST, Jim, *Writing Straight with Crooked Lines: A Memoir* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2020), pp. ix, 326. ISBN: 978-1626983571 (paper) \$30.00.

Half a century after Thomas Merton's death, there are few people left who met him or even saw him, let alone had a years-long relationship with him, which makes peace activist Jim Forest's eagerly anticipated memoir – in which he discusses his extensive correspondence with Merton about nuclear disarmament, anti-war activities and international peace – all the more valuable to Merton Society members.

As a young man, Forest attended the 1964 retreat at the Abbey of Gethsemani at which Merton, Daniel Berrigan, A. J. Muste and others explored "the spiritual roots of protest" (the subject of Gordon Oyer's

ITMS-award-winning book, *Pursuing the Spiritual Roots of Protest*¹). Earlier than that, Forest acted as a go-between at times for Merton and Dorothy Day while serving as the managing editor of *The Catholic Worker*. It was, in fact, Day's suggestion that Forest reply to a letter Merton had written to her that put the two men in touch. Over the years, Merton sent Forest some of his most articulate and passionate letters on the importance of nonviolence and opposition to nuclear armaments (reproduced and discussed in another Forest book, *The Root of War is Fear*²).

When the shocking self-immolation of a young Catholic Worker who had just witnessed the burning of draft cards shook Merton's faith in anti-war activism, it was Forest who reassured him by delineating all of the good work the Catholic Peace Fellowship, an organization he had cofounded and which Merton served as a board member, was doing.

Being guided by both Merton and Day would surely have been enough to help any young man of faith interested in serving God and humanity steer a true course, but Forest – who continues to advocate actively for peace as he enters his ninth decade – was blessed far beyond that. Among the mentors he introduces us to in his fascinating book are: Berrigan, Henri Nouwen, Alfred Hassler (the long-time executive director of the Fellowship of Reconciliation) and the Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh.

While Forest's book is labeled a "memoir," it is really the kind of old-fashioned whole-life autobiography only movie stars, politicians and retired generals seem allowed to write anymore. Because it is, we have a chance to witness the full development of a man who began his life as the only child of soon-to-be-divorced communist activists and dropped out of high school to join the Navy before Day and her Catholic Worker movement showed him the power of faith linked to social action. Along the way, we learn, through a trove of revealing stories, what it was like to be in relationship with Merton and these other faith leaders, as well as how it felt to be in the thick of what was arguably the most impassioned and effective pro-peace effort in American history, that of the 1960s and early 1970s.

One of the most appealing aspects of Forest's book is how candidly he discusses his own frailty (including his failed marriages and sometimes neglectful parenting, caused at times by the travel and pressures of running various peace-pursuing organizations) as well as the humanness of

1. Gordon Oyer, *Pursuing the Spiritual Roots of Protest: Merton, Berrigan, Yoder, and Muste at the Gethsemani Abbey Peacemakers Retreat* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014).

2. Jim Forest, *The Root of War Is Fear: Thomas Merton's Advice to Peacemakers* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2016).

his better-known peers. We see Day's occasional severity, Berrigan's tendency toward self-righteousness and Merton's periodic mistrust of those out in the world arranging protests, leading marches and being arrested. (Forest himself spent approximately a year behind bars for participating as a member of the Milwaukee Fourteen in the burning of thousands of draft cards, a time he used to read important books he missed studying as a high-school dropout.)

The only religious leader who never seems to lose his temper or fail to support those around him is Nhat Hanh, who is known today mostly for his teachings in mindfulness but, as Forest reminds us, served during lecture tours of the U.S. in the 1960s as the face and voice of the Vietnamese people, introducing Americans not only to the humble ways of most of his fellow citizens but also his country's culture, food and literature. (Nhat Hanh and Merton spent a brief time together at Gethsemani in May 1966.)

While all of the well-known leaders who mentored Forest during his many years directing and helping to found important peace organizations left their marks on him, and he has honored several of them (Merton, Day, Berrigan, Nhat Hanh) by writing books about them, it seems clear from his memoir that the two most important ones were Day and Nhat Hanh. While Merton and Berrigan helped him think through the major issues of faith-impelled activism, it was Day who turned him from a young man who had lost his way into an important activist and organizer, and it was Nhat Hanh who taught an overly busy advocate for peace how to breathe and maintain a healthy spiritual connection.

Forest first met Nhat Hanh at the headquarters of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, a peace-promoting group with roots in the First World War, where he was working at the time. But it was only later, when he asked Nhat Hanh over tea how he should view the sense of enlightenment an experience with the then-legal drug LSD had given him, that there was, as Forest describes it, "a deep sense of connection, an almost audible click" (182) between them. After that, Nhat Hanh asked Forest to accompany him on his lecture tours whenever FOR's executive director, Al Hassler, who had arranged the trips, couldn't do so. During their times together, Nhat Hanh helped Forest see how to bring his often-divided life of work and family (including, eventually, six children) into harmony.

One of the great values of Forest's book is how deeply and honestly it takes us into the life of a dedicated and relentless advocate for peace whose advocacy is absolutely and unshakably founded on Jesus's call to care for humanity, especially the least among us. Although Forest spent much of his life in the Catholic Church and led both Catholic and ecumenical organizations before turning to Orthodox Christianity later,

he never slips into being a mouthpiece for any institution. In fact, he candidly discusses his difficulties with doctrines, church leaders and peers, showing at times how hard it can be to live by the words and example of Jesus while working for little pay with others struggling in similar circumstances to keep a hope and vision alive.

Forest credits three Latin words Merton cited on the first day of that 1964 retreat with helping him stay focused on what is important: *Domine ut videam – Lord, that I might see*. “This verse,” Forest writes,

from St. Jerome’s Latin translation of Mark’s Gospel, is the appeal that Bartimaeus made to Jesus to heal his blind eyes. It was a prayer at the heart of our retreat. I’ve been haunted by those words ever since. They opened the door to realizing that peacemaking begins with seeing, seeing what is really going on around us, seeing ourselves in relation to the world we are part of, seeing our lives in the light of the kingdom of God, seeing those who suffer, and seeing the image of God not only in friends but in enemies, seeing how interconnected we are. What we see and what we fail to see defines who we are and how we live our lives. (148)

It is a clear-eyed seeing – a willingness to look at what is there without looking away, both in himself and in the world – that most characterizes Forest’s book. What he sees and has seen, as well as how he views what he and others have done in pursuit of the best for humanity, both inspire and convict the reader. They ask in gentle but straightforward ways why so few of us dedicate ourselves to the kinds of issues, activities and people Forest has given his life to.

The last chapters of Forest’s book focus primarily on his movement into the Orthodox Church, which began in earnest when he traveled to Russia during the end of the communist era. His experiences among devout believers who had held tenaciously to their faith during decades of government hostility prompted him to write two books about them and eventually become Orthodox himself, while retaining enough of a tie to Catholicism to long for (and work for) an end to the centuries-old schism between them.

Among the many things that attracted him to Orthodoxy, Forest writes, was “the rebirth of *miloserdia* – the works of mercy” (299) in Russian church life in the late 1980s when Mikhail Gorbachev’s *glasnost* and *perestroika* were bringing the Soviet Union’s persecution of believers to an end. “For the first time since Lenin, Christians were being allowed, even encouraged, to openly play a role in the relief of suffering” (299).

Except during his early days in the Catholic Worker movement, when

he was still a teenager, Forest rarely took a hands-on role in the person-to-person relief of suffering himself, but almost everything he did – every job he held – supported, funded, supplemented, organized and undergirded that work. His story – told clearly and often humorously in this vital book – is a testament to the need for dedicated people of faith to work in all kinds of ways, whatever their skills or backgrounds, to make the world – our world – a more peaceful, less fractured and less oppressive place.

Near the end of his book, Forest tells us that virtually everyone who has introduced him for one of the hundreds of talks he has given over his long life has called him a peace activist. “The problem,” he writes,

is that I’m not by nature an activist. Perhaps there is something of Thomas Merton’s monastic temperament in me. I feel uncomfortable in crowds – masses of people drawn together by a common objective generate powerful currents and undertows that often scare me. . . . I have to convince myself that this specific act of protest or witness really is worth taking part in and then push myself by brute force out the door while wishing my conscience would leave me alone. I would much rather walk in the woods than walk in a march. (315)

Yet peace, Forest makes clear, requires more of us than we want to give, including what he calls, in the title of one of his books, “the hardest commandment”: loving our enemies.³ “Perhaps the most important thing I’ve learned,” he writes, is that if I cannot find the face of Jesus in the faces of those who are my enemies, if I cannot find him in the unbeautiful, if I cannot find him in those who have the ‘wrong ideas,’ if I cannot find him in the poor and the defeated, how will I find him in the bread and wine or in the life after death?” (316).

A few lines later, he gives us these words from Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s *The Gulag Archipelago*:

“The line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either – but right through every human heart – and through all human hearts. This line shifts. Inside us, it oscillates with the years. And even within hearts overwhelmed by evil, one small bridgehead of good is retained. And even in the best of hearts, there remains . . . an un-uprooted small corner of evil.” (316)

The title of his book, Forest tells us, comes from a Portuguese proverb: *God writes straight with crooked lines*. “It’s a truth that my life bears

3. Jim Forest, *Loving Our Enemies: Reflections on the Hardest Commandment* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2014).

witness to,” he writes. “God wastes nothing, not even our mistakes” (2). Mistakes and all, his has been a powerful life, rendered here in compelling stories that should enthrall and inspire any reader.

Michael N. McGregor

CATHOLIC NONVIOLENCE INITIATIVE, *Advancing Nonviolence and Just Peace in the Church and the World* edited by Rose Marie Berger, Ken Butigan, Judy Coode and Marie Dennis (Brussels: Pax Christi International, 2020), pp. 322. ISBN: 978-178456-716-3 (paper) \$29.45.

This book is the work of the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative, a project of Pax Christi International. In 2016 Pax Christi, along with the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (now part of the Vatican’s Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development), co-sponsored an international conference on the topic “Nonviolence and Just Peace.” The Catholic Nonviolence Initiative was created to continue to explore these themes and in 2017 began a multi-year process of discussion, discernment and research, drawing especially on the testimonies of those working for peace and justice in contexts of violence around the world. This book is a result of that collaborative process. Over 120 contributors to the book are listed. There was also a follow-up event entitled “The Path of Nonviolence: Towards a Culture of Peace” that took place in 2019 at which much of the material presented in this book was shared.

In explaining the rationale for the book, two “signs of the times” are highlighted. One is the global crisis of violence that the world is currently experiencing. The other is the spread of active, powerful and successful nonviolent action, which in numerous cases has even been able to overthrow military dictatorships and other repressive regimes. The goal of the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative is to move the Catholic Church as a whole towards a deeper principled embrace of nonviolence and a commitment to integrate nonviolence into Church formation and education at every level, building upon the strong critiques of war and support for nonviolent action by recent popes. As Robert McElroy, bishop of San Diego, states: “We need to mainstream nonviolence in the Church. We need to move it from the margins of Catholic thought to the center. Nonviolence is a spirituality, a lifestyle, a program of societal action and a universal ethic” (10).

In Part I of the book, entitled “Returning to Nonviolence,” testimonies are shared from Catholics working nonviolently on behalf of social justice around the world. Among the voices highlighted is that of Fr. Emmanuel Katongole of Uganda, who emphasizes the theological core of Catholic nonviolence: “Nonviolence is a calling, not simply because it ‘works’ but